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QUEEN DIDO'S TREASURE

"ENTER!" HE SAID TO THE MEN. "YOU TWO BOYS REMAIN WITHOUT."

QUEEN DIDO'S TREASURE

BY

ADA H. GLANVILLE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

ROLAND F. COSIMINI

J G458

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LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
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QUEEN DIDO'S TREASURE

CHAPTER I

A GALLEY FROM BRITAIN

SEA and sky were one flame of blue so intense that as a sea-gull fell like a plummet upon a fish, it was a surprise to see the bird rise again with breast unstained. So thought young Rai of the House of Barca, as he sat fishing in a small boat off the coast of Carthage some two thousand years ago. To his left, as he faced the east, was Sicily, and north of Sicily, lay Rome, scarcely three days' journey away by land and sea — Rome, the mortal foe of Carthage, though now those cities were at peace.

The last of the fishing fleet of Carthage had al-

ready straggled into the harbor as the noontime sun waxed unbearably warm, and Rai, as he drew in a fish, decided that it must be his last catch. He waked the fisherlad, Setu, owner of the boat, and plunged overboard for a swim before he slipped into his tunic.

It had taken Setu a long time to realize that one who could sit on cushions on the deck of his own pleasure galley, under a purple awning, with a dozen slaves to wait on him, should prefer to hire the boat of the poor Setu, to bait his own hooks, and to help row, but now he took this strange preference as a matter of course.

As Rai climbed into the boat, shaking sparkling drops from his body, he saw, coming round the point in the eye of the sun, a coasting vessel with sails set, for it had a breeze behind it.

"The Sea Eagle," said Setu, shading his eyes with a brown hand.

"Of Maharbal's fleet?" asked Rai.

"Before her time," assented Setu. "Mother will be pleased — my brother Ezar is her helmsman."

As they turned to make their way back to the quay, they saw with surprise that another galley was coming from the west, walking along,

thought Rai, like a great water beetle, with the long rows of oars plying swiftly.

Half-an-hour's brisk rowing took them into the outer harbor, which was full of fishing boats, busily unloading, and a few small coasters with loads of shell for the dye vats for the real Tyrian purple, of sponges, and of coral. The inner harbor was filled with trading ships, with the ten inglorious trireme-galleys with three banks of oars, — all the war fleet that Rome had left to Carthage. Rai could hardly bear to look at them as they swung idly at anchor, and there was a hidden fear behind his pride in his wonderful mother city that made his heart ache. Carthage had fallen low in her war with Rome, but surely, surely she would rise again to be once more Queen of the Western Seas. Hannibal, the great Hannibal, his own uncle and the greatest general the world had ever seen, greater even than Alexander, thought Rai, would yet bring the proud Romans to their knees, and all would be well.

The coasting galley drew in from the east and made the harbor as Rai and Setu reached the dock. Slowly she came in, with the oars on one side lifted and drawn back as she slid along the

quay. The slaves shipped their oars, and as the overseer unlocked the bar of their fetters, the men rose and stretched their weary limbs. Boxes and bales were lifted from the hold and carried to the warehouse through a chattering crowd.

Rai lingered in the cool shade of the great pillared docks and amused himself by trying to guess the contents of the many packages. Here was a consignment of marbles from the workshops of Athens, copies perhaps of old masterpieces, easy to be guessed though wrapped in straw and sacking; bales of linen — he could see the cartouches that marked them Egyptian; crates of pottery; rolls of silk from middle Asia; even furniture of ivory and ebony or cedar wood. This was not a food ship — there were other vessels unloading rice, corn, and spices, at another quay; and farther on were wool ships. All together there was not a tithe of the number of ships that had filled the harbors even ten years before.

Rai started once, thinking he had heard his name called, but he could see no one who had spoken. Then he moved farther up the quay, for the second galley was entering the harbor and he

could now see that it was one of his grandfather's ships. His grandfather's trader approached and spoke to him, rubbing his hands with satisfaction.

"See how heavy she rides," he said. "A full cargo."

"From far?" asked Rai.

"From the Cassitiredes and Cornwall, with tin. And a full cargo, if I'm any judge."

The slaves shipped oars with a shout of rejoicing. Landfall at last and home, even if it meant the slave pits by night and the docks by day, for a week or so while the vessel refitted. As Iddibal, Rai's grandfather, was unusually kind to his slaves, there was a meal waiting for them at night, with fresh fruit to add to their black bread and sour wine.

The warehouse slaves bore in load after load of block tin, and while the trader talked to the captain, Rai watched with curiosity a group of people on the forepeak who presently, at the captain's word, stepped down on to the dock. There were two young girls, a boy about Rai's own age, and a big youth who towered above the smallish Carthaginians by a full head. They were fair, too. Rai himself was accounted fair, for he had

Greek blood on his mother's side that showed in his skin and eyes; but these people had hair so bright that it positively flamed in the sun, and the big youth had a head, Rai thought, like an orange.

The trader spoke rapidly and angrily to the captain as they came ashore, but the black-bearded sailor shook his head. "Not so," he said gruffly. "They are not stolen. I know my orders: no kidnapping in a trading country. No, but it is a long story . . ."

"Come into my office," said the trader.

The captain shepherded his party into the cool room, and Rai, who was quite at home on his grandfather's property, followed. He was most anxious to hear what he could, for he liked the look of the boy.

"It is well on to ten years," began the captain, "no, more like fifteen now, that I've been trading tin with these youngsters' people and with other tribes over in Cornwall, and they've come to know me a bit. Why, there's a babe named after me in one chief's family! These young folks here . . . their father was a chief, too. I never can get my tongue round his jaw-cracking name. Well, the tribe had a war on with some other

tribe, and they were beaten, and the chief killed . . . "

Here the boy, who had been listening with strained attention, broke in with some fierce words in his own language.

"He says they took his father unawares," the captain explained. "When I came along, the victors had the sacrificial altars set, the priests, whom they call Druids, in full fig, and these youngsters in a wicker cage ready for the knife. But when they saw my sail from the hilltop, they postponed the ceremony and went down to the shore to welcome me and my goods. I knew naught of the matter then, but of course I have my orders, 'Never interfere with anything in a trading country.'

"The next day, though, the tribe were hot upon my trail, all as angry as bees. They said that the children had got away in the night, and they wanted to knock me over the head for helping them; but they soon saw I knew nothing and went their way, and I went mine. But by the tail of Dagon yonder, what should I find when I climbed on board my ship again and we were out at sea but these three." He jerked his chin at the

three young strangers. "The man there, who is a slave or servant, swam off from the shore later on, having escaped from the battle, and helped them to get off while the tribe were asleep."

"What are you going to do with them?" asked the trader. "You could get good money for them."

The captain made a quick gesture of refusal. "No, there must be none of that. They are free people, and by rights half the tin there belongs to them. The other tribe stole it. And they must be kept together. I promised them that."

Rai looked at the strange boy. Barbarian though he was, there was something in his bearing and in his face that showed strength and courage and reliability, and for the first time since his second brother Ethbaal had died two years before, he was attracted to some one of his own age. Ethbaal had always been his dearest friend, and no one had taken his place.

He drew the trader aside. "I . . . my grandfather will take them," he said. "They can stay with us, but I must ask grandfather first for form's sake. So if you will keep them here for the time, I will send for them later. Can they speak our tongue?"

"Yes," the captain answered, "they have spoken it with me and my men ever since they were babes. Besides, in our month's voyage they have talked little else."

"Good!" said Rai. He walked over to the boy. "Briton," he said, "if you and your sisters will come to my house, you will be welcome. I am Rai, Rai of the House of Barca."

"This is Ronwen, my sister," the other boy answered, "and this is Ceara, and I am Balin. We shall be pleased to go to your house."

"I am glad," said Rai, smiling.

Rai looked at the red-haired youth who stood behind the three, appearing in his wolfskin jerkin, with his quick-moving eyes, something like an animal on guard.

"And that man — do you want him with you?" he asked.

"Do you mean Gilla? Gilla is my man, and where I go, there goes Gilla."

"So it shall be," replied Rai. "I am going now to make ready. Do not fear," he added to the girls, "all will be well." He knew little about girls, but he meant to be kind.

Ronwen laughed scornfully, looking him up

and down. "He looks like a girl!" she said in her own language.

The three Britons were clothed in garments of coarsely woven wool and finely dressed deerskin; but Rai, of course, wore literally "purple and fine linen", for his white tunic was of the finest and deeply edged with the purple Tyrian dye that was a mark of rank, while a narrow band of gold circled his dark hair.

He wisely did not ask what Ronwen's remark meant, but after speaking to the two men and asking questions which he knew his grandfather would like answered, he went out through the pillared docks to where his own chariot waited, the two eager horses held in by a Nubian slave.

He drove past the Malqua, the fishing quarter, up the long Street of Health; through the city proper, the Byrsa; past the squares on the terraces, lined with the tall, black colossi, figures of gods, and fabulous animals, symbols of the gods; past groves of trees where shone the gilded temple roofs; past the booths of the shopkeepers and the workshops of the artisans; and on for almost seven miles.

About six hundred years before Rai's time,

Dido, Queen of Tyre, having been deposed by her nephew, had fled from Tyre, accompanied by the Phoenicians, to Utica, a colony of Tyre on the north coast of Africa. There she had found refuge and had founded a sea town which, taking the name of Carthage, became more powerful than the city to which it for a long time paid tribute.

It was a city half-colorful and half-sombre, for many of the houses as well as the colossi were of black marble, and all the poorer people were dressed in black clothes; but the awnings of the shops were of many bright hues, and the low cliffs between the terraces were gay with flowers.

The citadel lay on Rai's left as he drove on, and on his right the triple walls of the city. He drove through the gates of the Byrsa and into Megara, the suburb of the rich, where all the great palaces were — those of Hannibal, Hanno, the Council of One Hundred, some of the Senators, and of Rai's own maternal grandfather, Iddibal, with whom he lived. Rai's father, the youngest brother of Hannibal, had died of his wounds as he returned home from Italy ten years before; his mother had followed soon after; and since then Rai and his two brothers had lived in

the house of Iddibal. Their father's father, Hamilcar Barca, had long been dead.

The house was a great building of five stories, each story set back upon the one below it, with stairs of black marble and ebony between each two stories and the prows of galleys, captured in the first war with the Romans by men of the House, set at the corners of the terraces.

Rai found his grandfather and told him about the strangers. Iddibal gave his consent but told Rai to order the trader and the captain to come to the house with the young people that evening.

Rai turned away, but strangely enough something that had lain at the back of his mind came to the surface, and hesitatingly he spoke of the voice that had called his name upon the quay.

"It couldn't really have been anything," he said doubtfully.

"You mean that you feel it might have been Mago? But why should he not have come to you, had it been he?"

"I don't know, sir; but the more I think of it, the more it seems to me to have sounded like Mago's voice."

"Well, say nothing to Elissa," replied Iddibal.

CHAPTER II

MAGO'S STORY

THE great square bronze doors of the House of Barca were wide open to the night, and Rai stood on the terrace, looking over the city. It was time the fair-haired "savages", as his cousin Elissa had begun to call the strangers from Britain, arrived. He had spent the hours of the afternoon in wandering about restlessly, half-prepared to go down again to the docks to try to solve the mystery of the voice and half-thinking himself a fool to make so much of a sound that might be nothing but fancy.

"Anaximenes said," proclaimed some one at

his elbow, "that stars are fixed in the heavens like nails in a board; Heraclitus said that they are hollow bowls filled with fire, but Anaxagoras, whom the Athenians banished for his opinions, held that they were wandering worlds."

It was Chabrias, Rai's tutor, an Athenian himself, who spoke.

"Can you hear anything, sir?" asked Rai, ignoring the subject of the stars, about which he had nothing to say.

"I certainly can't hear the 'music of the spheres', as Pythagoras called it. Do you refer to any particular sound, Rai, or just sound in general?"

"There it is again!" cried Rai, and bounded off down the terrace as the unmistakable noise of fighting sounded, coming nearer and nearer to the gates. Rai found the usual guard stationed in the arched gateway, and he bade the men turn out. Then he himself snatched a sword from the wall and ran out into the road. Chabrias was not far behind, and the guard immediately followed.

As Rai dashed into the open, however, the assailants dissolved, much to his chagrin, and took to flight.

He was about to pursue them, when a commanding voice said, "Let them go."

"Mago," cried Rai, turning toward the speaker, "can it be you?"

"No other," replied the man, patting Rai's shoulder affectionately.

"Then it *was* you this morning," the younger brother asserted.

"Yes, I saw you and called out," said Mago. "But let us go into the house. Come, friends," he said cordially to the young Britons, the captain, and his grandfather's trader.

Iddibal had heard the disturbance and was on the steps, hurrying down with the rest of his house guard, when Mago and the others entered. There were a few hurried words of greeting, and Mago went off to speak to Elissa, his betrothed. The others gathered round the trader to hear the events of the evening.

"When we received the Lord Iddibal's message to bring the young strangers hither, we waited until the work of the day was over, for there was much to do. Then, since it was late, we supped. Balin went aboard the galley — his man Gilla following, of course — to find some property he had

left there. He lingered on the deck, he says, watching the lights, when he heard a splash in the water, so faint only ears like his, learned to catch the movements of the dog otter in his native river, would have caught. He saw the white lights—he calls it witch fire—the swimmer made in the dark water, and he and Gilla got down and helped the man on board. They brought him to me at his request. It was none other than Lord Mago. Then we heard a great stir on the other galley, the *Sea Eagle,* as her people discovered his escape. So we hid him safe until the search was over.

"The docks were full of soldiers, lord — the Suffete Hanno's men and temple guards, too — but they found him not. Then we put the Lord Mago in a litter covered with veils, and the two maidens walked beside it as though he were indeed a lady and their mistress, and so we carried him even as far as the inner gate yonder. The city guards let us pass, but followed soon after and said they must search the litter. We told them that we were carrying a lady, but naught would serve them but they must look for themselves. So one took hold of the maiden Ronwen

to drag her aside, and lo, the oil was properly in the fire. She slapped him, my lord, and the boy Balin flew at his throat, and the youth Gilla tackled another, and the captain here took two, and I — though not a fighting man, the gods forbid — even I was not idle," the trader finished modestly.

"I owe you all much," said Iddibal gravely. "And you not least, Balin, my son. Welcome to my house! You shall never lack a home, as long as it stands."

"I like fighting," replied Balin. "We did not do much. But also I like you. Gladly will I dwell in your house. I see there is plenty of room." He waved his hand about the great hall. "And I can help with the food getting, for I am not bad in the hunt."

"Yes, yes," replied Iddibal hastily, perhaps to hide a smile. "You can hunt surely; Rai will be glad of your company. Rai, take the maidens to your cousin, and bring Mago. I want his story."

Iddibal had refreshments brought to the captain and the trader and questioned them a little; then he himself escorted them to the gate and sent them home with a guard, as it was late.

Meanwhile Rai was in a predicament, as the girls refused to follow him. But he was rescued by the appearance of Elissa herself, with Mago, who had taken a hasty bath and changed his clothes so that he did not look as ruffianly as when he arrived. The slaves brought a small table with food and drink, and Mago had a much needed meal.

"Tell me why you all received me as though I were a ghost?" he asked.

"Mago, we had news of your death. Maharbal told us that his trader at Alexandria had seen you dead, you having been attacked by robbers," said Iddibal.

"I was attacked by robbers in the street at Alexandria, but not killed, as you see. I was on my way home from — well, where I had been — and having been chased by a ship that I suppose must have been a pirate — though I thought the Romans had left none on the seas, to give them their due — and sunk by it, I had no money. What? How saved? We were picked up after floating around on wreckage for two days by a Greek vessel and taken to Alexandria. I went to our agent there for money to bring me home and was set upon

twice. The first time there were two men, and I managed to escape. The second time they threw a cloak over me from behind while I was fighting several in a dark alley and carried me off as if I were a bale of wool, to dump me on board a galley. They kept me chained in the hold, but to-day I was put into the captain's cabin and caught a glimpse of Rai through the porthole. Of course he could not tell where I was and did not believe his ears, did you, Rai? But presently a boat came under the port with that youngster on it who goes fishing with you — I have been out with him, too — and he heard me when I called softly to him. It turned out that his brother was the helmsman, and between them they managed to free me of my bonds, and just in time, too."

"Good for Setu!" said Rai. "Grandfather," he continued gravely, "it was Maharbal's *Sea Eagle* that Mago was on."

"Maharbal concerned in this — this outrage?" asked Iddibal.

"Very much concerned, sir, as I think. You know he hates us as he hates Hannibal, being jealous of Hannibal's power, and he and, I think, the priest of Moloch, Baal-Azur, must have had

secret information as to where I had been and on what errand and waylaid me, hoping to steal my dispatches. I had none; so his men brought me hither, instead of throwing me overboard, so that Maharbal might induce me to speak."

"By torture, think you?"

"So I understood. They were naturally much concerned at my escape and did their best to recapture me."

"Hannibal must know of this!"

"I will go to him now," replied Mago. "You may come with me, Rai, if you wish. And your new friend . . . "

"Take more than them, Mago!" said Iddibal hastily. "The scoundrels will doubtless be lying in wait for you."

"We will go through the gardens, sir," said Mago reassuringly.

Mago and the boys wrapped themselves in their cloaks and went out into the moonlit garden, the air heavy with the scent of flowers, to a gate in the wall that led into Hannibal's domain.

Carthage was ruled by two judges, or magistrates, called Suffetes, elected from among the few great families who were really the lords

of the city. The family of Barca was one of these. Hamilcar Barca, Hannibal's father, had led the forces of Carthage against Rome in what is known as the First Punic War. After long years of fighting Carthage had lost her colonies in Sicily and had been forced to make terms of peace with Rome. But Hamilcar had taken his armies to Spain, which in a few years, by arms and conciliation, he had won for Carthage. It would not have been long before another empire in Spain would have been built up for the sea city, but that was no part of Rome's plans. For thirty-five years Hannibal, sworn by his father, Hamilcar, on the altar of Baal to undying enmity with Rome, had fought the Romans and never been conquered. Rai's heart had often swelled as he heard the story of his great soldier-uncle's victories; of his wonderful march from Spain, through Gaul, and across the pathless Alps to take Rome by storm from the north; and of how his army had appeared upon the plains of Italy, looking like phantoms but still able to fight and to win.

But Carthage was tired of war; her Suffetes were jealous of Hannibal; they sent him but a tithe of the reënforcements for which he asked,

and Hannibal had to retreat from Italy at last and cross to Africa. Scipio, the general of Rome and second only to Caesar in the long list of her soldiers — Scipio followed, and in the plains near the city of Zama utterly defeated Hannibal, though his veterans, miserably outnumbered, fought like the heroes they were to the last.

Ten years had passed since then, and Carthage had under Hannibal's firm and wise rule pulled herself together and was gradually regaining in new directions some of her old power, still watched jealously by her ancient enemy across the narrow seas.

Late as it was when his nephews and Balin arrived, Hannibal was up and pacing his room deep in thought. He was having troubled times with the Councils, for his ungrateful colleagues were restive under his rule, though no one else could have done what he had for the city's welfare and recovery.

He welcomed Mago with sincere pleasure, greeted Rai and Balin kindly, and listened intently to the former's story.

"You say Maharbal's men knew you had messages for me?" he asked.

"They knew something, perhaps not as much as they pretended," Mago answered.

Hannibal was silent a moment. "Maybe there are spies at the court of Syria. What said Antiochus to my request?"

Mago looked around. The boys were at a distance, examining a stand of arms, and there were no slaves in the chamber.

"King Antiochus," he replied, "bade me say that Syria would join with Nabis of Sparta and the Ætolians, and would fight the Romans in Greece. Philip of Macedon refused to join."

"In Greece!" said Hannibal. "But it is Italy that we must invade!"

"I said also that it was too soon to attack, but Antiochus replied that it must be soon or never, as Rome would ere long be too strong for us."

"That is true," said Hannibal. "And Philip refuses — he was ever a sapless tree. Not once only has he broken beneath me. Well, so be it. Meet me to-morrow with old Secharbas in the Temple of Eshmoun. I have a boon to ask of you, as Elissa's betrothed."

"And as your nephew, sir?" asked Mago.

"As my nephew and friend," said Hannibal warmly. "And now good-night."

Quickly the three returned through the quiet gardens to the great House of Barca where all was soon stilled in sleep.

But with the earliest light Iddibal's black major-domo slipped by the house guards, saying he was going to market. He then made his roundabout way to the house of Maharbal, where he left a message.

CHAPTER III

TREASURE CHESTS

RAI and Balin, who was daily growing more and more fluent in the Phoenician tongue, were walking in the garden, engaged in a conversation that seemed to be of absorbing interest, when a servant came to say that Rai was to go with Mago to the Temple of Eshmoun, the Temple of Health. Immediately the two boys went to Mago to ask if Balin could also be of the party, fully expecting a firm "no" for an answer. But Mago considered the question with thoughtful eyes fixed upon Balin's face.

"He may go," he said at last. "Rai, I think you

have shown your usual wisdom in the choice of a friend." Mago gave Balin a smile that completed his conquest of the island boy's heart.

Iddibal joined them, and two chariots took them to the Temple of Eshmoun. No human sacrifice stained the altars of this temple, and none of the horrible scenes took place here that made the temples of Baal-Moloch, of Tanit, and of Dagon, places of darkness and death. Rai himself had never taken part in any of these wild ceremonies, for his grandfather had always contrived to send him into the country at the time of the festivals.

"Such things are not for the young," Iddibal had said grimly, when he was reproached by Baal-Azur, the high priest of Moloch.

Incense rose from the swinging censers of the priests and, whirling about in clouds, made the tall figures of the gods, ranged around the walls, seem to writhe as if alive. Mago laid an offering upon the altar in thanks for his safe return, while the singing boys and the priests chanted a hymn. Then these filed out, and Secharbas, the old High Priest of Melkarth and Chief Priest of the

City, descended from the dais and led the little party into one of the temple rooms where he dwelt.

Hannibal meanwhile had entered the temple and, stepping from the shadows, greeted the party. Then Secharbas gave Rai and Balin each a torch and bade them take light from the cresset by the door. The old priest himself lighted a torch and drew aside a panel, and they passed one by one through the opening and into a stone passage. The torches but dimly lighted the way, which led to a flight of steps and down into the earth. There were many turnings and windings in this passage and short flights of stairs up and down, but at length they came to a wide vault held up by pillars. More stairs on the farther side of this vault led up into the temple of Baal, but Secharbas halted here. He found a place between two blocks of stone, roughly carved into the shape of lions, and pressed an iron instrument into a small hole in the sculptured wall. A stone slab revolved slowly and disclosed a narrow opening.

"Enter!" he said to the men. "You two boys remain without, place your torches in the rings

— there are others if those burn out — and see that no one takes the key. The lock is only on this side; so you will have to let us out."

So saying, he slipped into the inner chamber and, when the others had entered, shut the slab behind him, leaving Rai and Balin in a far from enviable position, for the dim light only served to show the shadows and the strange unnatural shapes around them.

Meanwhile the men, lowering their heads, passed into a smaller vault, bare of anything but six great chests of iron and bronze that stood, four upon one side and two upon another, along the walls.

"This is the treasure of Queen Dido," said Secharbas, "the treasure of Melkarth that she brought away with her from Tyre when she fled from those who would have taken her life. Part of the gold she used to found this our city of Carthage; part of it she left in the charge of the high priest, to be used at times of dire need for the city. Thrice in the long tale of years that have passed since her day have the rulers of Carthage found help from Dido's treasure; but when Hannibal came with Baal-Azur and myself to open the last

chest and take the gold for use against the Romans — behold what we found!"

At the priest's request Mago raised the lid of the fourth chest, and they saw even in the flickering light that the heap of bars it held were of iron, not of gold, and that the goatskin bags, now slit open, had held sand, not gold dust.

"We found, as you see, that the bars were but painted cheats and the bags contained dust indeed but the dust of the desert. An ancient theft, we thought, for the thread that sewed the bags was as old as the bags themselves, and they are very old.

"You, Iddibal, knew of this treasure in common with the other members of the Senate; but what further I have to tell is as strange to you as to them. The gold in these other chests was left with the temple as a sacred charge for the daughters of Dido's line. Twenty-five maidens, according to the records, have had their dowries from Dido's chests. Elissa, my granddaughter and yours, Dido's descendant, as you know, is the last one to have it, for the records say there is but one portion left. Fearing that this, too, might have been stolen, we of the temple decided that Mago, as

Elissa's representative, should break the seals of this last chest."

"And if the gold is there," said Hannibal, "pray give it to Carthage in place of the other."

"Hannibal, you are wrong in asking this," said Iddibal sternly. "Not that we would grudge the gold—you know what I myself have gladly given; but we hold our city on terms from the Romans, agreeing not to make war in Africa or out of Africa . . . "

"And are you content thus to hold it?" asked Hannibal fiercely. "I count my oath to them less binding than the oath of undying enmity to Rome I swore at my father's bidding upon the altar. For thirty-five years I waged war with them — I alone, one man against a nation, for what backing did Carthage give me? I would still save Carthage in spite of herself, for how long will Rome spare us? No, give me but gold enough . . . "

"Yes," interrupted Iddibal again, "there is the fatal flaw. The Romans fight for their own country; you must hire foreign soldiers with the aid of gold to carry on our war."

"And these fat Carthaginian swine sit upon their money bags and care not! If Rome should

make them lick the dust from her consul's shoes, they would do it rather than risk one talent! I tell you it is Rome or we; never will there be room for both — not while Rome has the power to wipe us out. Since I saw our harbor emptied of the ships that once sailed victoriously, I only live to invade Italy again and burn the ships of Rome that Carthage may again be safe!"

"Grandfather," said Mago quietly, "my Uncle Hannibal must have the treasure!"

"Be it so then," replied the old man sadly, "but we are already winning slowly back all that we have lost, making new markets, finding out new lands that in time . . . "

"Time! Rome will not give us time! She looks already with a jealous eye upon our increase of trade, and it will not be long before she finds some pretext for our destruction. But enough of talk!"

Mago broke the seals of the last chest and raised the heavy lid. He lifted out leather bags, then bars of gold and a small iron box; then he ran his fingers over the bottom of the box to make sure in the dim light that there was nothing left, and uttered an exclamation. He brought out a little

leathern bag and from it drew a flat, round object of a dirty gray color, with a gleam of gold where the surface had been scratched.

"It is covered with something," he said, and scraped it with his knife. The coating peeled off, leaving a gold disc, like a coin but as big as the palm of his hand, and bearing an inscription. He handed it to the old high priest.

"It is the old Phoenician writing!" exclaimed Secharbas, and read the legend:

"THE LAND OF OPHIR WHENCE KING HIRAM DREW GOLD AND PRECIOUS THINGS LIETH THUS:

"SAILING BY THE LAND OF PUNT THE SHIPS MUST TURN TO THE RIGHT. SOUTH AND EVER SOUTH MUST THEY SAIL TO THE GREAT RIVER WITH FOUR MOUTHS. THIS IS THE GATE.

"SOUTHWARD TO THE RIVER OF THE CROCODILES; WESTWARD TO THE PLACE OF THE THUNDERING SMOKE. THUS LIETH THE LAND.

"BUT THE VALLEY OF THE GLIT-

TERING STONES IS FOUR HUNDRED LEAGUES TO THE NORTH OF MONOFUTANA GUARDED BY A RED AND A WHITE MOUNTAIN. HERE ALSO IS MUCH GOLD."

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The Carthaginians stared at each other in silence. Then Hannibal spoke slowly and in deep tones, "Gold! The Place-of-Gold!"

"Something of this we knew by the records," said old Secharbas. "It was known that our forefathers drew much treasure from Ophir — which King Hiram shared with King Solomon, the son of David of Jerusalem, but the way thither was lost."

"Could we but find it again," continued Hannibal, "Carthage might live still! We should then have gold with which to buy the men, since they must be bought, to make an army like the one which crossed the Alps with me and fought like lions — what was left of them — at Zama . . . "

"Your first defeat," said Iddibal slowly.

"My first defeat!" repeated Hannibal. "You do well to remind me of it. A fatal defeat for Car-

thage, and you would stay me from mending it? Let us see what this small box holds."

Mago put the disc, which he had been examining, back in the bag and placed it on the lid of the next chest, and they all turned to look while he struggled with the opening of the small box. As it came open and they caught the blue glitter of diamonds, there was a sound behind them. Hannibal turned with a shout, but it was too late. A flitting form, that apparently had been in hiding behind one of the chests, was seen to seize the golden disc and turn toward the door. Before they could reach him, the man had slipped through the opening, the heavy slab had fallen into place, and as the key was outside, they were prisoners.

"The boys are out there," said Iddibal.

"Ah, I had forgotten the boys!" Hannibal drew a breath of relief. "But will they be able to open the door?"

"They should," replied Secharbas, "unless . . . "

"Unless they are overpowered," suggested Hannibal.

"Or the thief takes the key," added Mago.

"They would then go to Baal-Azur, doubtless," said Secharbas.

"I trust not!" exclaimed Hannibal with a grim laugh. "Baal-Azur and Maharbal are thief-and-thief against me and my aims. Nothing would please them better than to have me imprisoned here and in their power."

The men looked at each other with set faces as the priest's flickering torch gave one splutter and went out.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE TEMPLE

RAI and Balin, left behind in the shadowy hall, looked at each other and with one accord drew toward the wall, where they sat with their backs against the solid stone. They fixed their eyes upon the place of the secret opening and talked in low tones. There was so much to talk about, so much that Balin wanted to know about this strange place of worship overhead, that the time passed quickly.

At length they noticed that the torches had burnt almost out and they rose together to fetch and light others. They had not taken more than a

step when the clang of the door flung to broke upon the stillness. It was very dim in the vault, but they could just see a flitting black figure move from the place of the opening toward the stairs.

"Something is wrong!" cried Rai, and they dashed after the man, for they could see that he was not one of their party. Moreover there was a stealth in his movements that was disturbing. As they ran, he turned his head and made a bound for the steps.

"You go on," said Rai. "I will follow."

He ran back to the door of the vault, to find, as he suspected, that the key was not in the hole, and though he pushed and tugged, he could not move the slab. Now it was more important than ever to catch the mysterious intruder, and Rai followed quickly up the long stairs.

The vault was beneath the Temple of Moloch, and after a while the stairs emerged from the earth and entered the outer wall of the temple itself, running between the stones.

Ahead Rai could hear the thud of climbing feet and tried to go more quickly, but it was very dark and the steps were uneven. Then an opening gave upon a passage, and at some distance

ahead a light shone, as though from around a corner. Now he heard the panting sounds of a tussle and broke again into a run. When he reached the light, he saw Balin and a man struggling together on a narrow sort of gallery with dark space beyond it. The man shouted something Rai could not understand, just as Balin tripped and threw him. The man fell against a railing that gave way and he went over the edge. With a desperate clutch the man grasped hold of a jutting bar of iron with one hand. Balin lay down and leaned over to pull him up, while Rai, who had reached them, knelt beside Balin to help. The man threw what he held in his other hand up on to the ledge and shouted again in the strange tongue. He made a despairing clutch at Balin's hand with his own free hand, but the bar gave way, and with a shriek he fell.

Sick and shuddering the boys stood up. Far below them they could see flickering lights, the great forms of stone gods, and the huge brazen statue of Moloch, while across in the opposite gallery of the building, which Rai now knew to be the Temple of Moloch, a torch lit up a peering face. The encounter had happened so swiftly

that perhaps this peeping one had not known what was passing, yet the boys realised that they might be in some peril, and pulling themselves together, they slipped back into the passage. Balin picked up the object the intruder had thrown and found it to be a leathern bag. But they had no time to examine it, for they could imagine angry priests rushing upon them from every side. They ran along, guiding themselves by the wall as they went. Presently Balin stopped and sniffed.

"This is not the way we came," he said. "It smells of people."

"But there was only one passage," said Rai.

"Was there? We were going too fast to notice — and besides it was dark. It is evil here; it reminds me of the Druid House."

They came to stairs presently and, descending them, came into a sort of hall, like the other, but Balin said it was not the same. Then there was a heavy rustle, and instinctively Balin threw the bag up into the lap of a seated stone figure just as a leather curtain was drawn aside, and the boys found themselves standing in the full blaze of light coming from a room filled with men.

The man who had moved the curtain seized the two and dragged them into the room. Surprised and scowling faces were turned upon them, and there was an ominous silence for a moment.

"Who are ye?" asked a fierce voice.

Rai saw that the speaker was Maharbal who, though he was Elissa's uncle, was the bitter enemy of the House of Barca.

The speaker half rose from his seat to see the better. "Why, 'tis young Rai, Iddibal's grandson," he said with a frown. "What are you doing here?"

"We lost our way, sir," answered Rai. "Secharbas allowed us to go down to see the places underground, and we came too far."

"Spies!" muttered one man.

"Secharbas, the old fool!" grunted another.

Maharbal leaned over and spoke to a priest beside him, who bore the symbols of Moloch on his robes and cap and who was none other than Baal-Azur.

"Who is that?" asked the priest arrogantly, pointing to Balin with a stylus he held.

"Who is that?" repeated Rai. "He is my friend and comes from the northern islands—from

Cornwall where the tin comes from," he added kindly.

"Ah, yes," sneered Baal-Azur, "a slave of yours or Iddibal's?"

"No slave," said Rai.

"Ah!" The priest looked down. "Well, go home and tell Secharbas, with my compliments, that the underground passages are unhealthy for little boys."

Rai bowed with a touch of mock deference that was a trifle unwise.

"But your friend, being a foreigner and belonging to no one . . . "

Baal-Azur was interrupted by the rush of feet. The curtain was torn aside and several breathless priests burst into the room.

"What is this?" he cried harshly, his hand going to his knife.

They halted and bowed. "We could not find your holiness sooner," said one, "to tell you that there are thieves in the temple!" His glance fell upon Balin, and an accusing finger shot out. "There stands the dog!" he shouted.

"What do you mean?"

"Adherbal, the captain of the temple guards,

crashed but now from the upper gallery to the floor of the temple, my lord. And this youth was seen struggling with him."

"Good," said Baal-Azur, "that puts a different face on the matter of thy wanderings, my Lord Rai. What have you to say now?"

"Naught," said Rai.

The high priest made a sign, and each of the boys was seized by two stalwart priests. Their arms were twisted behind them, so roughly that the pain was considerable.

"Tell me what you were doing?" ordered the high priest.

There was a glint in Baal-Azur's eyes that promised much if the boys did not speak; but Rai knew in the depths of his heart that he must not tell. Although he and Balin had not been let into the secret of Hannibal's conference, Rai knew that there was great enmity between Marhabal and this high priest and the great general Hannibal. He would not for the world let them know that Hannibal was shut helplessly in the secret vault.

"We were looking around," he said doggedly.

"You were struggling with one of our guards.

Why?" demanded the priest. Rai was in a predicament. If he said the man had stolen something, they would want to know what it was and where it was. He did not care to lie; it was not well to do so.

"I cannot say," he answered.

The high priest rose from his seat and came close to them.

"You mean you will not!" he cried.

He raised his hand as if to strike, but Maharbal spoke quickly.

"That will prove of no avail, Baal-Azur. You might know that metal such as this only rings truer for being struck. Put these young people into a cell to meditate for a night, and they will perhaps be more amenable. Then, if they do not tell — well, the fires can always be fed."

The other scowled but gave way. As he seated himself again, he made a sign, and Rai and Balin were scuffled away into the hall, thrown into a cell, and left alone, with a great slamming of the heavy door and rattling of iron bolts to show that they were well and truly imprisoned.

CHAPTER V

THE ESCAPE

THE two boys looked at each other in the faint light of the cell, and Balin chuckled.

"Very like the Druid House," he murmured.

"Why laugh? Is there anything to laugh at?" asked Rai, annoyed.

"Did he not mean that we were to be fed to the fires if we did not speak? It seems so queer that I should have come all this way from the victim cage of the Druid House only to be cast to — what do you call him, Moloch?"

"You escaped that other time," said Rai. "But what I am thinking about is this — was I right not

to tell? You see, the others are shut up in that secret place, and no one knows they are there but us."

"I think you were right not to tell anything to that person all covered over with symbols," replied Balin placidly. "Besides, your Hannibal would hate to be released by those two enemies."

"Maharbal hates our House; and Baal-Azur would give his right hand to be Chief Priest of the City in old Secharbas' place."

"A man like that priest would do just that," Balin replied.

"Just what?" asked Rai.

"What you're thinking he might do, if he knew."

"Be still and think how we are to get out, Balin," said Rai, punching him good-humoredly. They indulged in a satisfying little scuffle until they found they were raising too much ancient dust; then they sat silently for a time deep in thought.

"We simply must get out to-night," said Rai. "How about jumping on the jailer when he brings our supper? One on each side of the door?"

"It is little likely that he'll give us the chance.

And besides, I don't believe they will bring us any supper."

"No supper!" Their last meal was a long-forgotten affair of hours before, and the prospect of having to pass perhaps a dozen more long hours without food was appalling. "That settles it!" said Rai. "We get out of here to-night!"

"Well, the door being impossible, what about the window?" asked Balin.

It was a space big enough to let them through with a squeeze, but it rose far above their heads, and there was nothing in the bare cell by which they might raise themselves to it. Round and round they prowled, tapping the walls to see if they were solid, crawling on their hands and knees to do the same to the floor, until at last they had to give in and sit side by side in despair.

"I wonder why your gods like blood so much," queried Balin. "Blood's horrid stuff, I think, and stinks. But then, of course, your god Moloch — or is his name Melkarth . . . ?"

"There are two," said Rai gruffly, "but neither is god of mine. Chabrias says that on the road to Athens there is an altar 'To the Unknown God', and that is the God we worship, Elissa, and Mago,

and Chabrias, and I. We have an altar in the garden and deck it with flowers and fruit, and Chabrias reads to us out of the old Greek writings. Grandfather worships Melkarth and Eshmoun still, but he does not object to our God, nor does Secharbas. Grandfather says he wishes he was not too old to change. He says you can not change your gods as you do your clothes, but he and Chabrias often talk — I like to listen to them. Not that I understand half they say. But no one must ever know this — I mean about our altar — or nothing could keep us from the fires."

"I'm hungry," said Balin suddenly. "And I'm going to make another try." He rose, stretched his arms and legs, and began walking about the cell.

Rai went as far away from the window as he could and stared up at the open space. "There's a star!" he said. "So it opens on the outside air."

"Of course it does; there's the smell of the sea blowing in. Well, here's a plan," said Balin, and explained a scheme he had evolved.

Fortunately the men had not searched the boys thoroughly, and Balin had a knife slung between his shoulders, which he had always carried since his imprisonment in the House of the Druids.

With this they slit Rai's long cloak into two lengths, knotted the halves together, reinforced it with Balin's cloak, and thus they had a rope. Then they stood under the opening, and Rai climbed upon Balin's shoulders, and Balin took hold of Rai's ankles. Rai spread his hands against the wall, and Balin slowly raised his friend as far as his arms could reach. Strong though he was, it was no easy task, and light and lithe as was Rai, it was a marvel of poise that kept him upright. Both, however, were somewhat practised in athletics — Rai through training, thanks to Iddibal and Chabrias, and Balin through the necessity of cliff climbing in his homeland.

Rai was just able to grasp the edge of the opening, which had a downward and outward slope, and he drew himself up to sit astride the sill, half in and half out the window.

There followed a long and tedious struggle, for added to the difficulties of the darkness and Rai's cramped position, was the soft heaviness of the improvised rope. Balin patiently threw it again and again, and at last Rai caught it. There was nothing whatever to fasten it to, and Rai, after a low word telling Balin to hold fast to the

rope and climb it as soon as it began to rise, tied it fast around his own waist and dropped out of the window on the outside, first stuffing his tunic under the rope at the sill to prevent the rope from chafing against the sharp stone.

He knew nothing of what lay beneath the window. Should the rope part, he would certainly be dashed to the ground, and the ground might be distant half the height of the temple, even more if the window rose above the steep hillside. But Hannibal and his grandfather must be rescued; he must try to save them and so help Carthage. He must take the chance.

However, both cloaks were made of well-woven linen, and Balin had knotted them with sailor knots — and they held. After the first fall Balin, being the heavier, kept Rai from dropping too quickly.

For a few fearful moments Rai swayed at the end of the rope; then he steadied as Balin reached the opening and hung half through it. Balin felt the rope jerk once and loosen. He then knew that Rai had either fallen off into space or found a footing, and he waited anxiously until he heard a whistle from below, as nearly like the scream of

the rock coney as Rai could make it, signifying that Rai had not fallen off, but had found some kind of a footing. Balin drew a breath of relief, and only then did it occur to him that they had made no plan for his own descent.

Rai realised this at the same moment and gave in the impulse of the moment a tremendous groan that even at that serious moment, or perhaps because of it, so amused Balin that he nearly lost his balance. He was in a most uncomfortable position for merriment, hanging head down out of a narrow window. Squirming himself backwards he managed somehow, still keeping hold of the precious rope, to settle himself with his legs over the sill, and his head bent low, for the opening was small for him.

Rai tapped the ground with his feet, still clinging to the rope. He seemed to be on a ledge of rock, and one too narrow for Balin to risk dropping down to, with no weight to check his progress; but as Rai's eyes grew more used to the dark, he made out against the lighter sky the outline of the dark mass above them, too regular to be anything but a building. Then he told Balin to drop the rope, and he braced himself against the wall

to receive it. It fell into his arms, and holding it thus he sidled along the ledge until he reached an unexpected and most welcome niche formed by the wall and a buttress springing from below. It stopped his further progress, but the wider space gave him a chance to swathe the rope around himself, leaving his hands free. Then he set himself to swarm up the angle of the buttress and the wall, which weather-worn surface fortunately was full of cracks, and scraping skin from elbows and shins as he went, he climbed almost quickly to the top of the wall.

There was no light anywhere in sight along the wall, and he hoped for the best, a hope that was fulfilled when he scrambled up over the edge, for there was no one to be seen on guard. There was no parapet to the flat terrace, from which the next story of the temple rose some yards back. There were window openings in this second wall, which might be giving air to the temple itself or be windows to cells; and any sound might rouse the priests.

Rai walked softly therefore to the spot above the opening where Balin still sat and found to his dismay that here again there was nothing

to which to fasten the rope. That, at least, was his first conclusion, but he soon found that a little beyond the space there was a projection of stone—by the feel of it, it seemed to be a stone head that was the end of a waterspout. So he tied the rope around the stone, leaving an end for himself to hold, and then he dropped the rope, peering over anxiously to see where it fell. It fell, fortunately, beside the opening, and within Balin's reach.

"Yet," thought Rai, "his whole weight will fall suddenly upon it when he leaves the sill. That is another strain to put on it, after all it has borne. Will it still hold?"

Balin took hold of the rope as high up as he could reach, crouching as best he could on the sill; then he launched himself into space, spun dizzily a moment, steadied, and climbed up the rope like a sailor. Almost before Rai could catch his breath, Balin was up, his knee on the edge, his body on the terrace.

They waited only a moment before moving on, seeking another waterspout to which to tie the rope. Happily they found one over the window of the fourth cell along the row. The doors of all the cells were standing open, they knew, when

they had been imprisoned, and it was probable that they were still open, as they had seemed to be unoccupied. Balin went down the rope first to the opening and peered within. The moon was just rising, too late to be a danger but in time to send a ray of light into the cell and show that it was indeed empty and that the door stood open. Balin gave the signal and dropped down within, and Rai followed.

Then, leaving the rope hanging outside, they walked out of the cell, with no one to say them nay, and made their way back to the hall where they had come face to face with Maharbal. Balin found the leather bag still on the lap of the stone figure. They opened it excitedly and in the darkness felt of its contents. The iron key was there, and also something like a coin. Then, like two shadows, they stole out of that place. The passages were dark and full of an unfriendly feeling. There was an atmosphere of human occupancy, and now and then the sound of a sleeper drifted to them, and they had to be very careful, for in many places the doorways of the priests' quarters were covered only by leather curtains.

So great was their fear that they were almost

in despair when they reached the head of some stairs at the foot of which, they felt sure, was the place of the secret door. Trembling in the darkness they found the keyhole, and Rai pressed the iron thing into it. There was a heavy slithering sound, and the slab had turned.

"Are you there, grandfather?" called Rai from the opening in an anxious voice. "Are you there?"

For a tense moment there was no answer. Then some one gave a sigh.

"What is it?" asked the voice of Secharbas. "Is it you, Rai?"

"Are the others asleep?" cried Rai in astonishment.

Then there were sounds of stirring and of footsteps, and the men came out into the passage, shutting the slab behind them and touching hands in the darkness to feel that they were really all there.

They had to carry the old high priest up the long way they had to go, but at length they stood once more in his room. He went straight to his bed, and the others went to Hannibal's house and roused the slaves to bring them food. The boys were almost in rags and very dirty. So they had a

plunge and clean clothes were found for them, while a hot and savory meal was speedily prepared. Hannibal and Mago were used to going without food for long periods and, after satisfying their hunger, they sat looking on in amusement while Rai and Balin continued to eat and to talk between mouthfuls.

At the end of the tale Hannibal looked at Mago and said, "What strikes you most about that story, Mago?"

Rai's brother answered grimly, "That they are a pair of reckless young monkeys!" But his eyes were smiling as he looked at them.

"Yes, that indeed," said Hannibal, "but to me it was the good sense of your young brother in not giving us away. What made you keep silence, Rai?"

"Well, sir," replied Rai modestly, "I saw Maharbal there and knew that he does not like us. And they all looked to be such scoundrels. We both thought you would rather we got you out ourselves, if we could."

"At your age I was commanding one of my father's armies in Spain," said Hannibal thoughtfully. "No, perhaps a little older, but with some

training I would give you a cohort, and Balin should be a cavalry leader . . . "

"Is there to be war, then, sir?" asked Rai eagerly.

"The gods forbid!" said Iddibal, who had been listening in silence.

"They only can tell," said Hannibal, rising. "Mago shall tell you boys the story of the golden disc you saved, for you deserve to be trusted. And ask of me what you will, but nothing that Iddibal would ban."

He and Iddibal went away to rest a little before going to an early meeting of the Council, and Mago told the boys of the finding of the golden disc.

"While we sat waiting there in the dark," said Mago, "we planned my journey, for I am to go at once to seek the Place-of-Gold."

"And may we go with you — Hannibal said we might ask for anything we liked?"

"Anything that grandfather approves."

"I suppose grandfather will not approve," said Rai sadly. "What a journey it will be! Do you go by land or sea?"

"By sea," replied Mago. "We know that Libya,

or Africa, is surrounded by the ocean. The land of Punt lies south of Egypt, and men of Tyre in ships of Egypt once sailed around the whole of Libya, it is said. We shall not have to do that; we shall need to go but part way round. Hannibal has given me two years in which to go and return. I am to take miners and of course an armed force, men of his guard; and, Melkarth aiding me, we will bring back gold enough to save Carthage, as he says, in spite of herself."

"Lucky Mago!" said Rai.

"Men of our race have taken greater risks and sailed into lonelier seas and have returned. You have read of Hanno the Navigator who planted our colonies on the west coast, and Himilco, his brother admiral, who sailed west and north and reached the floating 'seaweed meadows.' He sailed, they say, beyond and found a strange country with sweet-scented airs, and men as red as copper. Well, this voyage of mine is less perilous, since half the way will be in well-known seas. The greatest difficulty will be to evade the Romans, for their galleys swarm the narrow waters. We shall have to act very quickly and in secret and go out as simple traders. Luckily grandfather has

two galleys ready to sail. We shall warp them out ourselves, taking Balin's friend, the captain, and another learned in sea-lore to act as mariners. We shall sail to Palestine, cross Palestine by camel train to Akabah, and there on the Red Sea again take ship and sail for Punt.

CHAPTER VI

MAKING ENEMIES

IT was one morning a month later. Having concluded a wrestling match in the gymnasium, during which neither Rai nor Balin could get the better of Chabrias, who seemed able to do anything he desired, and having had a swim in the sunken bath in the lower garden, the three were now resting under a vine trellis in the garden.

Elissa's doves were flying about in the trees, near the fountain stood two ibis, and on the grass several tame animals, which Iddibal kept under the care of a young Egyptian slave, were being put

through some of their tricks for the amusement of the girls behind the lattice of Elissa's room. There were gazelles, a baboon, two small monkeys, an ichneumon, and a great marabout stork; and the baboon was especially clever. Argia, Elissa's Greek maid, was singing to the sound of a lyre the song of the sea mew, "Bird of spring, with radiant plumes and heart that knows no sigh."

Rai, who was supposed to study several hours every day, had been reading with Chabrias. Balin, an island barbarian, of course knew naught of learning and was content to lie idly looking at the blue sky through the green vine leaves and watching the wheeling pigeons. He knew enough of the language to like to listen when they read of such things as the voyages of Hanno the Navigator, the ancient stories of Carthage, or the conquests of Hamilcar and Hannibal; but Greek was beyond him, and they had been reading only Greek this morning.

Every one was happy and peaceful until a slave came to bring Rai a tablet. Rai read it with a frown. "An invitation from Assyncho to a sup-

per party on the bay to-night. I wonder — shall I go?" he muttered.

" 'Now, as every man is free to act and free to choose, any one may take up with evil or select the good,' " quoted Chabrias from the roll in his hand, as though talking to himself, with his eyes on the distant sea.

Rai flushed. "You are right. Their silly supper parties bore me to death," said he, and turning the tablet around, he wrote his answer with his stylus on the soft wax.

The bowing slave took it and left them to their peace, but the episode had made Rai restless. "Let us see if any oranges are ripe on the trees sent grandfather from Asia," he said, rising. Balin jumped to his feet, but seeing some one approaching, sat down again.

"Greetings, Rai! Greetings, Chabrias!" said the newcomer, ignoring Balin.

"Greetings, Metten. You do not know my friend Balin. Balin, this is Metten, Maharbal's son."

Metten, a dissipated youth a year or so older than Rai, gave Balin a stare and a cool nod and turned back to Rai. "I came to see if you are go-

ing to this bay party to-night and to suggest that we go together."

"Oh, are you going?" drawled Rai. "I'm not."

"But why not? People are beginning to say that you never go anywhere. Does your grandfather forbid it?"

"What if he did?" replied Rai tranquilly. "I would say it was sensible of him to do so, knowing Assyncho and his parties. Balin and I are going quail shooting to-morrow early, and I do not find such parties do my shooting hand any good. You can tell Assyncho I said so, if you like."

"Foolish! You can go shooting any morning."

Annoyed, Metten took up one of the small monkeys and began to tease it, till suddenly the monkey gave a wail of pain. Balin reached over, took the creature from Metten's grasp, and swung it up on the trellis, where it sat gibbering and making faces.

"Pinch the baboon if you must pinch something, Metten," said Balin.

Metten got up. "Do you allow your tame savage to interfere with your guests, Rai?"

"Guest? Oh, you mean the monkey. But he is one of the family."

Metten could not resist this opening. "Indeed! I would not claim a monkey as a relation," he said sneeringly.

"I would rather have a monkey in the family than some people," Rai retorted, and the words had a particular significance since Metten's elder brother had wooed Elissa in vain. Metten choked with rage.

"Farewell," he gulped. "I care not to stay chattering with children all the morning. The men will laugh when I tell them your excuse. Afraid of a cup or two of wine! What a fool you are!"

"Console yourself that you will never be a fool of that kind, Metten," replied Rai. "Look out for the fountain, if you are going that way!"

Metten was stalking away in the wrong direction in his wrath, outraged dignity in every line of his bearing, when the monkey dropped without any warning upon his head and began to pull his hair. The surprise and the attack together caused Metten to lose his balance, and he staggered and fell into the fountain on hands and knees. A peal of feminine laughter rang from the window above and proved the last straw. Half-

blind with rage Metten scrambled to his feet and stepped out of the water.

Rai quickly rose. "Metten, I'm sorry," he called. "Come back, and let me drive you home."

"Thanks," said Metten over his shoulder, "I have had enough of your company and of your conversation."

"Well, anyway," replied Rai, "that is not the way out."

"I'm going to visit Aunt Asteria," replied Metten loftily, and passed on up the steps.

"Is he really related to you?" asked Balin, with a doubtful look.

"The gods forbid! No, but Elissa's Aunt Asteria, who lives here, as you know, is Metten's aunt as well. I wish she had chosen to go to Maharbal's house when her husband died, but she would come with Elissa. And now we shall have to go quail hunting to-morrow, since I said we were going. So come and we'll ask old Phra about the dogs."

Half an hour afterwards they saw Metten departing. He made a derisive gesture in their direction. "I know everything!" he called with a

triumph in his low tone that was vaguely threatening.

"Now what does he mean by that?" whispered Rai.

"It sounds as if he meant a good deal," Balin answered.

"But what does Aunt Asteria know that would interest him?" asked Rai. "Anyhow, what does it matter?"

The boys put the incident from their minds, never suspecting that they would have it recalled to them later.

Rai and Balin had gone about together all over the city, now watching the caravans come in, now down on the docks looking at the ships, now investigating the shipyards where the busy hammers rang. To-day, for a change, they went to the street of the artisans.

When Rai was a child, he had once taken the chariot reins from the slave who drove and had himself guided the horses, against all orders. In consequence a child had been knocked down, and Rai, frightened at the gathering crowd and their black looks, had let the slave turn at once and drive him swiftly home. But he had told the

whole story to his father, who had driven him straight back and sent him all alone to speak to the parents. Thereafter he had gone every day to take food and toys to the child and to sit with him, till the neighbors had come not only to forget the injury but to be very fond of Rai and to welcome his visits. Yet Rai himself still blushed at thought of the accident and his cowardly flight.

He went now to the shop of the boy's father who was an armorer, Abu by name, and, having ordered a new armlet, left Balin there at his own request while he went on to the jeweller's some distance away. Balin liked to watch people at work and stood now looking on while the armorer and one of his six sons plied their tools, hammering out the peaceful household implements that were all they could make now that Carthage was no longer at war.

It chanced that the priests of one of the lesser gods had been taking their charge and deity on a visit to the temple of Tanit and were returning in slightly hilarious pomp. As the gleam of the gilded image caught Balin's eye, he followed along with the procession with interest, not heed-

ing the actions of the bystanders. The priests at the end of the procession were pointing him out, more in jest than earnest, to a dark-faced man of the temple guards, who gave allegiance to Hanno. Suddenly a heavy hand fell upon Balin's shoulder and he was forced to his knees.

"Kneel! Kneel!" cried a voice, and fierce laughter followed.

"Are not our gods pleasing to you?"

At the touch Balin's savage instincts rose and he became a wildcat; he sprang, seemingly straight from his knees, at the man's throat. He hooked his foot under the other's knee, causing him to fall heavily, and Balin flung himself down on his captive. When the man's comrades had enjoyed a good laugh at their friend's expense, they laid hands on Balin and dragged him away, four to one, and held him at arm's length, white with rage but helpless. The fellow he had knocked down rose stiffly, drew his knife with a snarling oath, and would have plunged it into Balin's back, had not a hand caught his wrist.

"Hold!" said a deep voice. "Neighbors, this is a friend of the Lord Rai — shall he be killed before our eyes?"

Abu the armorer gave a twist to the wrist he held, and the knife fell to the ground. He kicked it away, listening to the captive's curses with a grim smile.

"Hot breath heals no wounds, nor breaks no bones," he said and met the man's murderous scowl with a smile that threw out his stiff black beard.

"Run, Siidu," ordered Abu of the carpenter. "The Lord Rai's charioteer is around yonder corner. Call him. These hired ruffians of our great ones think the city made for them." Abu swung his hammer lightly.

Gilla, who had followed the chariot on foot, came running up now, and his face reddened at the signs of trouble. "Is there to be a fight?" he asked eagerly.

Balin looked at him. "Yes," he answered grimly, "but only for me and him!" He indicated the dark-faced one. Then turning, he spoke to Abu. "Thank you, friend, but loose him now and keep the others from me!"

Abu nodded, let go the wrist he held, and stepped back, still hefting his hammer, while the other men of the quarter, armed with the

tools of their trades, stood between the two and the other men of the guard.

"My knife," grunted the late captive.

"You do not need your knife," said Balin, handing his own to Gilla.

"How else am I to fight?"

"This way!" said Balin, and sprang again at the man.

When Rai drove rapidly up a moment or two later, the man was on the ground again, but this time Balin stood quietly over him and waited for him to rise. Then a second time Balin knocked him down.

"No," said the man. "I fight no more. This is no civilized way of fighting. Give me my knife, and I'll take on the three of you."

"Go," commanded Rai, "and learn not to trouble peaceful people!"

"Peaceful!" muttered the man. "Peaceful, by all the gods! . . . But this is not the end."

CHAPTER VII

A NIGHT ALARM

THE boys mounted the chariot again, Gilla clinging on behind. As they drove down the Street of Health, they passed Iddibal going to the Council. Rai stopped, stepped out, and went across to speak to his grandfather, to tell him briefly of what had happened. Iddibal looked very grave.

"You say that they were temple guards and the Suffete Hanno's men? 'Tis a pity that this should have occurred just now, for Hannibal is fighting the Council, and this will fan the opposition against him as Balin is of my household. I am

afraid the men who came to Balin's aid will suffer, too — the armorer and the others. Baal-Azur and Hanno — but not so much Hanno, for Maharbal is behind him and incites him — are very jealous of their dignity and their official privilege."

Rai was dismayed at these words. "Grandfather," he questioned, "are Abu and the others really in danger?"

"I fear so indeed. It all comes to this. Hannibal's enemies will grasp this chance of prejudicing men who are followers of Hannibal against him."

"But Hannibal *can* and will protect Abu if . . . ?"

"I will not add to his troubles by asking more of him. He would have to ask aid of Baal-Azur — and perhaps at the expense of more important matters."

"But they stood by me, grandfather, and Balin would have been killed had it not been for Abu. We owe them protection!"

Iddibal gave the boy a thoughtful look. "Do what you will, boy," he said, and drove on.

Rai went back to the chariot and let Balin

drive while he stood thinking. At length he spoke. "Turn back," he said.

They turned into one of the side streets and drove back to the quarter of the artisans. Rai entered the booth of Abu and found the man and his neighbors still discussing the unpleasant affair.

Rai looked about him and, seeing that there were no strangers in the place, expressed his grandfather's fear and gave them the warning. Abu looked calmly down at him.

"Well, well," he said, "if there is to be war between us, the loyal followers of Hannibal, and Carthage, so be it."

"But the priests, Abu! Moloch is never so satisfied but that he can swallow more."

"The priests? Ah, that's a metal of another temper."

"The times are troublous, Abu, and a sacrifice, such as a great man like you, would be propitious."

"Ay, wasteful that would be. There's no metal work the equal of mine in the city, and for an arm like mine to be burned to a cinder — what a wrong!"

"We know not what may befall," said Rai, "but while the House of Barca stands, there is no need for you to fear the altar. Let you and the others and your families shelter within our gates until you can get away into the country until the priests forget."

"Go into exile?" cried one of the circle.

"Better exile than such a death," said another. "I for one will go and thankfully. I have been thinking before now of going to some place where men need arms and weapons. Art sure, Lord Rai, that it is needful?"

"My grandfather says that because you took sides with Hannibal's house, you are sure to suffer both from the Suffete Hanno and from the priests."

"Better talk it over, Abu," advised Siidu the carpenter. Abu looked at Rai.

"You had better leave at once," said Rai. "There is no need for secrecy but much need for speed. But go separately; it is not necessary to make a show. If they do not send to seize you within our gates, then grandfather is wrong, and you can return to your homes. It does no harm to be careful."

Rai and Balin drove home straightway then to make preparations to receive the men should they come, and come most of them did, all indeed but the jeweller and a potter who had been of the group.

When Iddibal returned later, with a troubled face, he sent for Rai. "I could find it in my heart to wish we had never taken that firebrand of a Balin into the house," he said. "There is a storm raging because of him. He has killed a guard of the temple of Melkarth; he has fought with a guard of the Suffete; he has insulted Maharbal's son."

"And all those things I shared in," said Rai.

"Assuredly, but as yet they do not mention you. That no doubt will come. The members of the Council sit there fairly choking with the riches that Hannibal has made it possible for them to gain — who but he would have pulled the city together after its defeat — and yet he has to fight every inch of the way against their stupidity and greed! They even say that he should pay half the indemnity the Romans have levied because it was through him we were defeated, and that they are weary of paying. . . . But what have

you done, boy, about these loyal friends of yours?"

"Grandfather, they are already camped in our grounds."

Iddibal started. "You have been quick, but it is well. So we of the House of Barca are at war, eh? What have you plunged me into? Yet . . . safety can be too dearly bought."

He pressed Rai's shoulder, and they went out together to inspect the camp. It was a fairly large one, for there were five men and their families, and though none had six sons but Abu, all had children. Altogether about thirty souls had taken the shelter offered them.

Balin and Rai set sentries at the gates, and went the rounds every hour, helping the steward give out provisions, talking to the women who went about their cooking at open fires as though they did it every day, playing with the children, and altogether enjoying themselves hugely. No one took this affair really seriously, fully expecting to be back in their homes the next day.

Half the night was gone, and Rai had dragged himself awake to go the rounds once more, when there was a noise at the outer gate—the stamp of

horses, the rattle of harnesses, and the confused sound of voices.

Rai and Balin were at the gate almost before they were sufficiently awake to realize it, and Iddibal soon followed.

The bewildered guards were strengthening the bolts when Rai heard Hannibal's deep voice over the wall, and ordered them with a shout to cease and to fling the gates open at once. The boys looked out as Hannibal strode in, leading his horse, and saw, drawn up across the road in front of the gates a troop of horsemen, Hannibal's own guard. More horsemen came galloping up the road and reined in suddenly with shouts that rang down the line to die away in the distance.

Hannibal conferred briefly in low tones with Iddibal. Both looked very serious. Then Hannibal glanced around, nodded smilingly to the boys, and was gone.

At Iddibal's orders the slaves barred the gates, and there came again from outside the ring of weapons. Hannibal's men seemed to be preparing for a charge.

Rai started toward the gate, but Iddibal called him back. "Secharbas is dying, so Hannibal says,

and Baal-Azur has taken up the side of our enemies, feeling himself already High Priest. The household must go away to the farm; there is no need for all of us to suffer. Hannibal gives us until dawn to get as far from the city as we can."

The rest of the night the wall of horsemen stood between the house and its enemies, while within all made ready for the departure. Slaves were roused and set to work. The house was stripped of its many treasures; though there were numbers of slaves and all were laden, much had to be left. All the food in store, however, was taken.

The little company went through the gardens of the house of Iddibal into the gardens of Hannibal, and from thence through the gates in the three outer walls that opened on to the landward side and led to the back country and beyond that to the desert.

Hannibal's men held these gates, and outside were horses and camels which he had ordered for the loads. All mounted, and the men placed the children in front of them. All but the most necessary things were left in Hannibal's house, and Iddibal, too, stayed there, leaving the charge of the household in the hands of Rai.

CHAPTER VIII

THE JEWEL MAP

A WEARY and dusty band it was that rode at last into the courtyard of Iddibal's building that was fortress and farmhouse combined, on the slope of a hill almost on the outskirts of the last fertile land bordering on the desert.

The farmer, a slave of Iddibal's, was an old friend of Rai, for the hottest months of every summer for years had found the latter staying there. The man welcomed them with anxious hospitality, found quarters for all, and made them as comfortable as he could.

Messengers came and went between Rai and

Iddibal, and on the surface all seemed quiet. Every morning Rai and Balin rode out, followed by Gilla; and Elissa surprised them by appearing one day with Ronwen and Ceara, demanding to be taken with them. Ronwen and Ceara had ridden the half-wild ponies of their home moors since they could walk, but Elissa had always gone abroad in litters or on camel back. Every day from that time on she improved in the art of horsemanship, and soon the six of them were taking long rides toward the distant mountains, or by the salty marshes, or even in the desert. Sometimes Chabrias rode with them, but, though he rode well, he was not fond of it and preferred to sit in the shade and read.

Sunny day after sunny day flew past, and though Rai sometimes worried, thinking of his grandfather and his hero, Hannibal, still he knew that his place was there with the household where he was told to be, and he did his best as governor of the little fort.

Then one night there was a knocking on the outer gate, and when Rai, summoned by the gatekeeper, cried out, "Who comes?", to his surprise his summons was answered by the deep

voice of Hannibal. Quickly the bolts were drawn, and a troop rode in — Hannibal, Iddibal, and half a score of Hannibal's veterans.

A meal was prepared, and Hannibal explained the reason for his coming.

"My enemies have betrayed me to the Romans," he said. "Somehow they got wind of my mission to Antiochus — we knew that from Mago — and they have sent word to Rome that I am planning war. Well, I am planning for war — but not immediate war. I am not strong enough—yet. If I stay at home, the Romans will make that a pretext for invading us; they will sack Cathage, and I cannot stand against them. So I must flee. My household has already gone round by sea; the galley will come in at Gabes yonder to take me up — and you also."

"Where are we to go, sir?" asked Rai.

"To Antiochus — to Syria, with me."

They separated, to sleep out the rest of the night. Rai, however, slept little. He was miserable. His hero was in exile! Hannibal, it was true, had lived most of his life out of Carthage, in Spain and in Italy, but always he had been fighting for his country and able to return to it if he

wished. The situation now was sadly different.

The next morning Iddibal was found to be ill of a fever that had been threatening him for some days; he was at times unconscious and quite unable to rise. While attending him Rai came upon the golden disc slung around his neck and took it himself for safe keeping. Mago had had a copy made of the directions, and the disc had been left with Iddibal. Rai rubbed the golden coin affectionately and pressed it in his palms, and lo! — it opened. He had touched a secret spring.

Rai left the old man in good care and hastened with the news of Iddibal's illness to Hannibal, who was at table.

"You must follow as soon as may be, lad. I would stay here with you, but the enemy will soon be on my track."

"Uncle!" said Rai, and there was a hint of excitement kept forcibly in bounds in his voice. "Uncle," he repeated, "you remember the gold disc that sent Mago on his quest? I was looking at it, and found a secret spring. See, there is more inside than we knew."

He held out the tablet, open now in two halves,

and Hannibal bent over to look at them. "A proper woman's toy!" he said with a smile. "It must surely have been made for Dido."

On the one half, besides words, was something that looked like a map but a strange one. It was done in green enamel, with straggling lines in blue, which might be rivers, branching from north to south, and again from east to west. Where this latter branch turned to the north, there was a bit of rock crystal; farther on there was a chain of turquoises that might be meant for lakes, and between the point of crystal and these turquoises were two tiny precious stones — a ruby and a diamond.

The other circle revealed an equal richness; small diamonds, pressed into the gold, were evidently meant to represent stars, while a bit of rock crystal was the crescent moon with strange signs at one side.

"Do you make much of this, Rai?" asked Hannibal, looking sceptical.

"Isn't it a map, sir?" replied Rai eagerly. "See, this is Egypt — and here is the Nile. And might not the other river be the one mentioned on the outer side of the disc?"

"It is possible! And the writing?"

Rai looked across the table at Chabrias who was calmly eating fruit. "Will you read it, Chabrias?" he asked. "The words are rather cramped — "

After dipping his fingers into water and drying them on a towel which a slave held out, Chabrias took the disc.

"The words say this," he said:

'I, Dido, finding an old record of King Hiram, sent men from Tyre to seek the Land of Gold whence he drew his treasure. Without trouble they came to it; but men of Arabia had taken the land, and fighting they fled. Passing the Falling Water, Monofutana, they attained the Valley of Lulala, guarded by the Red and the White Mountains. There they rested, sending to me by the river of Egypt much gold and many gems.

'Wherefore I, Dido, make this record.'

"And the signs here are in the Egyptian writing, and the chart of stars is the sailing directions, as our friend the Captain would call them."

Chabrias took a tablet and a stylus from his belt and, writing a translation of the signs, passed it across to Hannibal.

"If we had only found this before Mago sailed!" said Rai. "He has but half the story to go by."

"Do not fear for Mago," replied Hannibal. "He has some of my best men and he himself is a worthy son of his house. He has crossed safely to the Red Sea, and that is much."

"Then you have heard from him, sir?" asked Rai.

Hannibal nodded. "I meant to have told you. A message came just before I left."

"I am glad," exclaimed Rai, "but, sir, I have a thought. When grandfather is better, he and the women folk will follow you, but let Chabrias and Balin and me go to search for Mago and help him find the Place-of-Gold."

"But this toy map of yours shows the way through Egypt — and Egypt to us is practically an enemy country."

"Yes, sir, but if we went south to the land of the pygmies and east toward Lower Egypt, should we not at last come to these lakes that must be at

the source of the Nile? And from there we could find the Falling Water — Monofutana it must be, don't you think, meaning the same as the Thundering Smoke?"

"It is evidently a great cataract," said Chabrias, "such as there is, I have heard, in the Nile. And I remember that Herodotus the historian says that at Sais a priest told him that the Nile rose between two mountains called Crophi and Mophi. May not these be they?" He put his finger on the two tiny gems.

As Rai bent over the map, the eyes of the two men met over the boy's head. Those of Hannibal, who knew that Rai would be entering upon a path of uncertain end, if he set out on this strange journey, said, "As well this end as another, perhaps." And those of Chabrias gave back a calm assurance that he would stand by as long as needed.

"It could be done," Rai went on, "though it must lie very far south, this country; these stars are not of our skies."

"The hazard is great," said Hannibal. "Yet you may even be better off in those unknown lands than with me at the Court of Syria or where next

the Romans chase me, if I do not succeed there. Iddibal, I fear, will scarcely recover, so I leave you man of the house; and I know you will not fail, Rai, go where you will."

"And if we find the gold?" asked Rai.

"Build another Carthage there in the south, for I think there is no hope for this city. Ride with me now to the shore; I must haste."

An hour or two later Rai watched the galley that had come to meet Hannibal move away with him on board. There was a halo of glory round his head, to Rai's eyes, as his hero went forward to meet what promised to be harrassed years and perhaps even a hard death.

When the ship had disappeared from sight, Rai and his servants returned to the farm, leading the spare horses, and life assumed its former appearance. As the following days passed, Iddibal grew slightly better but yet not well enough to be moved.

The little riding party went out every day now. Ronwen was inclined to ride too fast and always was ahead, and Rai, feeling responsible for the company, asked Balin to speak to her about it. Balin, however, shook his head with laughing

eyes and told him he would not. So Rai, speaking shortly, one day bade her keep with the rest.

"Oh," returned Ronwen airily, "is it my fault that my horse, being better ridden, goes too fast for you tortoises?"

"Understand, Ronwen, please, that you are not to outpace the rest," returned Rai.

"Indeed, my lord!" said Ronwen, and giving her horse a touch, away she flew. Rai's great black quickly came up with her, and he leaned over to take her reins. She promptly boxed his ears, but Rai hung to her horse's bridle and turned both horses. As a result Ronwen was in a furious temper all day, but appeared sweet and smiling the next morning.

"Beware of her," whispered Balin with a grin, but Rai was pleased with her docility. He little knew!

When they reached the end of the mountain spur, the farthest point to which they ever went, and turned back, Rai dismounted as usual, for they always rested the horses there and ate fruit that Gilla carried. But no sooner had he tied his horse to a sapling and gone to help Elissa than Ronwen with a laugh shot past him out into the

plains to the west, and not only she, but Elissa and Ceara followed her. Rai made a dive for his horse, but Ronwen had given it a cut as she passed and the black so reared and danced about that it was a moment or two before Rai could quiet him. Gilla, always last, came lumbering up, and they set off in pursuit. Balin had edged out a little to cut the girls off, but his steed was not as swift as the gray that Ronwen rode, and she forged ahead. Then Balin's horse caught his foot in a hole, for the plain was thick with jerboas, and threw him, and though he was up in a moment, the three had gained on him considerably.

There was danger from the rough ground, danger also that a roving lion or two might be aroused or that some other peril might appear, as the girls found out. They rode down a little hill and suddenly found themselves in the midst of a small troop of Numidians, the scouts of a party bent on a raid.

Quick as a flash Ronwen and Ceara turned to fly, but Elissa, least assured of them all, was left behind and surrounded. Ronwen missed her and turned her head to look. Then she reined about and thundered down like an avenging goddess

upon the startled men. The gray rode right over one, and Ronwen wheeled to bring him back upon the others, but one leaned from his saddle, sword in hand, and hamstrung the beautiful beast with one swift stroke. Horse and rider fell to the ground with a crash and the raider sprang down to lift Ronwen to his saddle. The young Briton fought her captor like a wildcat until Rai and Balin swept upon them and he dropped her to face the boys.

Rai had his sword, but Balin had only his knife, a wide-bladed thing about a foot long that Abu had made for him to his own design. For a few minutes the fight was furious. Rai cut one Numidian through the shoulder, but he merely changed his sword to his other hand. Balin disabled his man, and then Gilla came up on his big horse, his spear held before him like a lance. Just as things began to turn in their favour, there came a startled shriek from Ceara, who finding herself alone had stayed her flight. The boys were too much occupied to hear her, but Elissa and Ronwen turned and cried a warning. More of the Numidian troop had appeared from somewhere and were riding down upon them at top speed.

Suddenly Elissa took the little dagger, that she wore as part of her attire, from her belt and struck the man who held her horse a blow on the shoulder. The surprise as much as anything startled him into loosening his hold. She instantly brought her horse to Ronwen's side, and Ronwen, standing on her poor gray's dead body, put her toe in Elissa's stirrup and sprang up behind Elissa. As the boys heard the shrieks and looked round to see the newcomers riding upon them, they managed to free themselves and, taking the only wise course, they followed after the fleeing girls. Elissa's horse threatened to fall behind the others; so ranging up alongside, Balin lifted Elissa to his own horse, leaving Ronwen to ride alone.

On and on they thundered, avoiding rat holes by a miracle, taking the best way by dint of habit —and minute by minute the Numidians drew nearer. Rai motioned to the others to ride on while he and Gilla would try to delay the pursuit, but Balin shouted that it was useless. They were hopelessly outnumbered and all they could do was to keep on, in the hope that the enemy would draw off when they saw the house. Now

they gained a few yards by avoiding a heavy patch, while the pursuers rode through it; now Ceara, the weakest of the party, swayed and nearly fell. They had one consolation; they were going too fast for weapons to come into play. At last the white farmhouse came into sight in the distance; but the desert men were close behind them and showed no signs of abandoning the chase.

Then Balin, keenest sighted, gave a shout of joy and turning in his saddle, he shouted words that were almost lost in the thud of hoofs. All saw that men were riding toward them from the house, black specks that speedily grew larger and larger. The pursuers would be outnumbered; and when they realized this, the Numidians stopped.

Foremost of the rescuers was Chabrias, calm, white-robed, and gentle as ever, while behind him rode a motley company made up of Abu's sons, Siidu and the other exiles, the farm hands, and the house slaves, all clinging to their horses' manes.

"It was great fun," said Ronwen calmly, shaking back her red hair.

"Yes! And all because of you, you minx!" said Rai.

"Those are Massinissa's own men," said Chabrias to Rai, "and if I know anything of Massinissa and Numidians, we have not seen the last of them. 'The hoarse cries of straining men' and bah! the sweaty smell of horses!" He gave Rai a look, wrinkled up his nose, and began to ride back.

Rai and Balin turned and looked toward the west. There in the shelter of a clump of trees the Numidians had halted and were making camp. The yellowish ground, covered with gray-green bush, ant heaps, and stones, stretched away into the sunset and met the desert on the horizon. A minute or two Rai looked with shielding hands.

"Do you see anything?" he asked.

"Riders," said Balin.

"Camel riders," said Rai. "Come on."

CHAPTER IX

"THE DAUGHTERS OF THE CHIEF!"

SINCE the farm was far in the wilds, it was a little fortress in itself, with high stone walls and a deep ditch on all sides except at the back where there was a ravine so steep that it was considered sufficient defense. Iddibal, who was not able to do aught himself, put into Rai's charge the preparation for a state of siege with the Numidians. Chabrias was there to give advice, for as a boy he had fought under Hannibal; but, as he himself said, he was too lazy to be bothered with manual labor if some one else would do it for him. That, according to Iddibal, was his only fault.

Most of the flocks and herds were sent down along the sides of the ravine and hidden there. Rai decided to concentrate the defense on the inner building, the house itself, though he mounted in the towers at the corners of the outer walls, two old weapons that were in the storerooms — a catapult that shot great arrows, and a ballista from which stones could be fired.

The farmhouse was two stories high, the upper one, as was the custom, set back from the lower, thus forming a terrace of the lower roof. All the window openings were inside on a courtyard, save one. Rai had a barricade of wool bales and of bales of hay built around the edge of this terrace and, finding a heap of hides in an outhouse, had the bales covered with these, to lessen the danger of fire.

Then, having brought the whole population of the place within the walls, seen to it that every vessel the house possessed was filled with water from the well, which was in the outer court, gathered all the food and put it under care, he set the slaves to work under Abu's direction to make arrows for the catapult and smaller ones for the bows. Everything he could do, thus, was done.

The next morning the Numidians rode up to the walls and blew a loud blast on a trumpet. When Chabrias, deputed to answer them, appeared on the wall, they insolently demanded that the party of riders of the day before be given up to them.

"For what do you take us?" asked Chabrias calmly.

"You for a lily-livered Greek!" they shouted, speaking in the Carthage tongue which was understood and spoken by many of the people of Africa. "And the rest for dogs of Carthaginians!"

"Go in peace, poor slaves of Rome," said Chabrias, "and we will let you live."

"Get down, Chabrias!" shouted Rai, who from inside the tower on the angle could see the men below draw back their darts, ready to throw.

But Chabrias stood there as if waiting. "Are you going?" he asked pleasantly. "We are just about to eat, but later if you come again . . . "

"A plain answer to a plain question, Greek," said the leader. "Will you give us the maidens and the lads?"

"Fool!" said Chabrias, shrugging his cloak from his shoulder into his hand.

"Captain! He mocks you!" said a raider who had more wit than the leader.

The latter, suddenly realizing the situation, made a sign, and a score of darts flew straight at Chabrias, who still stood his ground. But Chabrias had twirled his cloak with a deft and rapid motion in front of him so that it acted as a shield. No arrow pierced him, though some touched him. Then he slipped down to the platform that ran along the inside of the wall and made his way to the angle where the catapult had been set up. Abu's sons and the other men stretched their bows, and a flight of arrows from all along the wall halted the Numidians as they pressed toward the gate.

Since by the terms of peace after Zama Carthage was forbidden by Rome to make war, less than ever were its citizens trained to arms; but Hannibal had his own guard besides his veterans, and Abu, an old soldier, had seen to it that each of his sons for a year at least had been of this guard. Their arrows flew straight and took effect therefore.

The enemy was not prepared for much resistance, and they soon exhausted their supply of

ammunition. Some of them had slings and battered the walls with stones, catching a slave who was helping with the ballista and knocking him backwards with a broken leg into the court. That, however, was the only casualty suffered by the defenders, and it was won at the cost of two dead on the Numidian side.

The enemy withdrew and consulted together, then dismounted out of range, and spent the morning in quiet. At midday another band appeared, and the house was surrounded except where the ravine broke the line. Then the desert men attacked again, sending their arrows high so that they would fall into the court, but they hurt no one.

Suddenly, tiring of shooting with no apparent result, the Numidians rushed the walls. The defenders did their utmost to keep them at a distance, but the enemy came up, crossed the ditch in spite of the fire of the clumsy catapults, stood on the backs of their horses, and drew themselves up the walls. Each defender tackled the man in front of him, but they were greatly outnumbered, and a score of Numidians reached the house itself.

Chabrias and Abu, in charge of the catapults, turned them in and raked the enemy from behind, while some one from the rampart of hay bales shot and shot again, every arrow finding its mark. Rai with his sword, Balin with his knife, and Gilla with a great club, were each the centre of a desperate fight; while Abu's sons had two foemen to every one of them, and the unseen bowmen from the terrace went on planting arrows where they would do most harm. The catapults, worked by their little knot of slaves, were turned again to rake the outer side of the wall and the ditch. No other Numidians managed to scale the walls, and at last the court was cleared. Rai then sounded the signal for retreat, and leaving the outer courtyard to the enemy, every one went inside the house, flushed with victory and the heat of the fight. The House of Barca had lost three men, besides the first one wounded, and another attack would be repulsed with greater difficulty.

The catapults were brought in as well as all the missiles that could be gathered, and the enemy wounded left to the care of their own men.

The Numidians soon scaled the walls and opened the gates, pulled down the sheepfolds and

the partitions of the outhouses to use for fires, for by this time it was grown too dark to fight.

To his great grief Rai found Iddibal lying dead of a sword thrust at the foot of the stairs leading to the terrace. Ill as he was, the old man had come out, hearing the men in the court, and had fought valiantly, selling his life dearly, as they saw by the Numidians that lay around him.

"Who was shooting from the terrace?" asked Rai, when he could turn his thoughts from his grandfather.

"Who but the daughters of the Chief!" exclaimed Gilla in a complacent voice.

"Oh, Ronwen and Ceara, of course," said Balin.

"Do you mean that those girls were shooting like that?" cried Rai.

"Why not?" asked Balin. "They can shoot."

"They can shoot!" muttered Rai.

He then went up to the terrace, to find Elissa binding up Ceara's arm, where the bow string had cut it, and Ronwen unstringing her bow.

The night passed anxiously. The next day the enemy made several attacks which were repulsed with more and more difficulty; but at sunset Ron-

wen called Rai to the roof and told him that men were coming from the north.

"From the north!" cried Rai. "Then they come from Carthage. Are you sure, Ronwen?" for his eyes were not so keen as hers.

"That is north," she said, pointing. "Then they come from there. A pity it is because we alone could kill all these."

"But if they come from Carthage, they come to take us," exclaimed Rai.

The Numidians also had seen the coming men, and Rai and Ronwen stood and watched while they mounted and rode away, shouting out fierce threats against the little garrison and promises to come again.

An hour later the newcomers were knocking at the outer gates, which had been hastily closed. Rai spoke with them through the wicket, and the voice of Maharbal answered him. "Open, at once; we have the envoys of Rome with us."

"Oh!" said Rai. "What do the envoys of Rome want with us?"

"Insolent youth!" cried Maharbal. "Admit us at once."

Then a Roman spoke. "Are you the commander

of this garrison?" he asked. "We were told that it was the farmhouse of Iddibal."

"I am the master here," replied Rai.

There were muttered words, and some one said, "Then Iddibal and Hannibal have gone on?"

"It is not very courteous, young sir, to keep us outside your gates," said the Roman.

"I have no wish to be discourteous," returned Rai, "but I have reason to distrust the company you ride in."

"Hark you, boy," shouted Maharbal, "you defy us at your peril. We seek Hannibal and know that he is here."

"Hannibal is not here. Two of you may enter, and search, but the rest must remain outside," ordered Rai.

"We accept your terms, young man," replied the Roman.

He spoke to Maharbal, who gave a sharp order, and the band, composed of temple guards and guards of the Suffete, drew back. The gates were unbarred, and two Romans entered. The rampart of hide-covered bales was evident, and the marks of the fight were still to be seen, though the farm slaves were busily restoring order. The envoys

looked surprised, but said nothing. Rai conducted them quietly from room to room, excepting that in which valiant old Iddibal lay and those where Elissa and the girls were mourning.

"I give you my word that Hannibal is not in either," said Rai, as they would have entered those rooms. And the Romans, men of integrity themselves, took his word.

"My advice to you, my boy," said one, as they went back to the hall, "is to go away from here as quickly as you can. These countrymen of yours want you, as no doubt you know, for sacrilege, they say. And you have been fighting here?"

"Yes, the Numidians," said Rai without hesitation.

"They attacked you?" asked the Roman.

Rai was too sensible to resent the question which the Roman, as a Roman, had an undoubted right to ask, and he told them the story of the raiding. The Roman looked at him thoughtfully.

"You are between Scylla and Charybdis indeed," he said, "and I repeat it — take my advice and leave. Go after your Hannibal, if you can. If not, yet go — go anywhere rather than remain here."

Rai thanked him gravely, and no more was said on the subject. And though the name of Roman was accursed in the House of Barca, Rai as the temporary head of the family was constrained to invite these two to sup and spend the night. They accepted with the proviso that Maharbal should be invited also.

"If you will protect us from him, sir," said Rai, "he may come."

"My hand on it, young man," replied the Roman.

Then Rai did what he had never thought to do, clasped hands with a Roman, forgetting that they were hereditary foes, remembering that true men, though they are foes, are better than false friends.

Chabrias met the visitors, explained that the house was in mourning, and that they could not entertain them as they would wish.

When day dawned, the Romans stayed until a grave was dug for Iddibal and the splendid old man was laid to rest.

Then Rai bade farewell to his guests, with strange feelings, and the Roman repeated his warning earnestly, for he had taken a great liking

to the lad. "Take my advice, boy, and go. You have stirred up a hornet's nest in these Numidians; they will never let you remain in peace. That is another grievance Maharbal has against you. He fears we Romans will charge this Numidian affair to his account."

"But you won't, sir? Carthage has nothing to do with it. It is our affair altogether."

"I understand. Carthage shall not suffer for this through you. If she had more sons like you, she would not stand where she does."

"I am the nephew of Hannibal, you know, sir," said Rai proudly, "and that is something to live up to."

At the name of Hannibal the face of the Roman hardened. "Pray for him and that for the sake of Carthage he remains quiet where he is," he said. He saluted, and rode after his party.

Maharbal intended to remain behind in order to keep his eye on the House of Barca, but the envoy forced him to ride away. With him went Lady Asteria who insisted on returning to Carthage with her brother-in-law. Metten, however, with a small guard, was stationed at the farm gates.

"There goes a man," said Chabrias, as he watched the envoy gallop after his party.

"Well, we have lost our aunt, bless her," said Rai.

"What she knows, Maharbal will soon know."

"Does she know anything? It was all very secret."

" 'The only secret a woman cannot learn is the secret of holding her tongue,' " quoted Chabrias from one of his innumerable rolls as he left.

A wild impatience came over Rai; the walls of his life seemed closing round about him, to imprison him. The thought came to him that perhaps never again would he have one of his utterly happy, carefree days, when he rode out in the early morning or idled in a boat on the blue waters as free, almost, as the sea gulls. He felt like an animal in a trap and as though he must leave, must flee from the burden of responsibility that fate was fastening on his shoulders. He turned desperately — to meet the calm eyes of Balin, and Balin understood. When Rai looked at his friend, his panic quieted. After all he was not alone; things were not so bad; there might still be good days.

CHAPTER X

AN INFAMOUS BARGAIN

THEY held a consultation as to what their next move had better be, and the farmer suggested diffidently that they go to the farm of a cousin of his, a freedman, about two miles away.

"We can go down by the ravine," said Chabrias.

"That is it; that is what we will do," cried Rai. "To-night, leaving lights burning in the house."

The farmer was doubtful. "For the men, yes; but it is not a way for the ladies."

"I swear the lady Elissa will go down as easily as Ronwen and Ceara, and they climb like cats," put in Balin. "If not, I will carry her."

But Elissa was willing to try, and the girls began at once to prepare for a retreat.

The sentries on the wall reported that the guards spent most of their time, when they were not asleep, in gambling and were none too watchful. Rai, therefore, decided that something could be done in daylight, and packs were made of food and clothes and lowered over the outer walls into the ravine. Toward sunset, after they had eaten, Balin, Chabrias, and a few other men took all the women and children down to the ravine, in order to save them the difficulties of the way after dark, and hid them in the bush. Then Rai went down with the rest of the party, leaving only Gilla and the farmer's son, who had volunteered to remain until just before dawn, to do sentry duty on the walls and otherwise deceive the enemy into thinking the farm still occupied.

All filed away safely in the dark, rounded the spur, and reached the friendly shelter of the other house, where they were joined at dawn by Gilla and the boy, who reported that in the dark hour before dawn the two of them had gathered all the beasts which the Numidians had left them in their hurried retreat, opened the gates stealthily,

and ridden out, to burst through Metten's sleeping camp, then turn to the right, and drive the animals to the grassy lands by the big lagoon, whence the farmer could recover them later.

The next day the party divided. Abu and the rest of the men from the city — all married men with families — went away to other towns where they might hope to make a living at their trades and be unmolested, though they would still be within the bounds of Carthage. The farmer and his men hoped to find a new temporary home nearby, and in the future return to the old farm. Rai gave the farmer his freedom in due form, for which the man was most heartily thankful, and then made out to him a deed of the farm and the cattle, also giving him a silver talent. To each of the other men he gave the stamped circles of leather that Carthage used for coins, to the value of a talent, which was worth about fifteen hundred dollars, and which meant to them, riches.

The two youngest of the sons of Abu who were not, like their brothers, married, desired to go with Rai, even when they heard his plan to travel through a strange and hostile region; and Elissa's own favourite maid, Argia the Greek, would not

part from her mistress, for Elissa and Balin's sisters were to go south with Rai and Balin. Elissa would not hear of anything else, and indeed there was nothing else for the women to do. So after due preparations the small band, not one of them, except Chabrias, over twenty, started off on an almost impossible journey.

Meanwhile, in the room of Baal-Azur, in the Temple of Baal-Moloch, the High Priest himself sat talking with his ally, Maharbal.

"The curse of Baal be on these interfering Romans!" the latter was saying, as he read a tablet a slave had just handed him. "Thanks to them I was forced to leave the family of Iddibal in peace, guarded safely, I thought, until I could return and deal with them; and here Metten writes to tell me they have escaped."

"Had you learned nothing more of their secret?" asked Baal-Azur with a frown.

"The Lady Asteria, my wife's sister, who, as you know, has been in Iddibal's household, is now in mine. You may remember that it was through her and her spying servant that we learned of the existence of a secret treasure in the south and of

Hannibal's plans for that accursed nephew of his, Mago, to seek it. Mago somehow eluded our spies and left before we knew he had gone. But Asteria tells me that it is Rai's plan to go after him, and as the household is now only ruled by that hare-brained boy, he will probably go."

"You think that if he goes, we can have him followed?"

"Exactly!"

"But such a journey as he plans is impossible. He could never do it!"

"Hannibal presumably thought that Mago could," said Maharbal.

"But Mago went by sea, did he not?"

"They seem to have found another way — I could not learn what."

"Across the desert and the unknown land of the pygmies it must be — it is an impossible journey," repeated Baal-Azur.

"But these young people of Hannibal's blood are just the kind to attempt the impossible—and to carry it through."

"Then you think the idea is worth consideration? The gold certainly must not reach Hannibal."

"Shall we keep them from going then?"

"No, but let them be followed to the place. If the gold is there, we may as well have it as they — and they can be disposed of."

"It will have to be a brave man to follow them thus into the unknown where who-knows-what may live!"

"And yet I have the very person!" Baal-Azur struck a gong and sent the slave who answered his call for Bochar.

In a few minutes there stood in the room a short plump man, who bowed and rubbed his hands. His round face wore a look of great good humor, but Baal-Azur's first words struck this from his face with almost ludicrous swiftness.

"What did you and Adherbal do with the gold of Carthage you stole from the treasure chests of Dido?"

"We stole nothing!" said Bochar.

"Don't lie," said the High Priest coldly.

"We stole nothing, my lord," repeated the man doggedly. "I don't deny that we intended to steal, but the first time one of us could get into the secret room after we had followed Secharbas there, he — I mean Adherbal — was caught and

the gold plate that he managed to take was stolen from him by that boy with the fair hair . . . "

"A gold plate?"

"That boy and Lord Rai chased him, and he had but time to call to me, as he struggled with them on the platform above the great statue, that there was a gold disc graven with a map of the Place-of-Gold. And the fool, instead of throwing it down, tried to buy his life from the boys by giving it to them. And they would have saved him if they could have, without it!"

"But we held them, and they had nothing!" exclaimed Baal-Azur.

"Nevertheless they had the gold plate. I saw Adherbal throw it on to the platform as he hung — the coward!"

"Then why did you keep silence?" said Maharbal.

"Need you ask? Of course he would not give away a secret like that!" The High Priest shook his finger at the man. "Hark you, Bochar. A theft from the temple is sacrilege, and the punishment of sacrilege is death — in the arms of Moloch."

The man's chubby face paled, but he managed to smile nevertheless. "But I stole not, my lord."

"Who knows?" replied Baal-Azur. "Death awaits you, I say — but if you are a bold man, there is a chance of life."

"I am not overbold," said Bochar. "But life is sweet. What is the chance?"

As he listened to the plan, his eyes widened. "To follow them until they find the Place-of-Gold! And then?"

"Then there are ways . . . " said Baal-Azur darkly.

"They need not enter the place," remarked Maharbal. "Having found it, you will return and lead men of Carthage to the spot. Sure death — against the chance of life; and if riches are found, there will be a reward."

"I am to follow them, secretly?"

"No. Gain their confidence; it should be easy. Go with them and do your best for them; without them we can do nothing. And when they find the place — dispose of them. They must not return."

"Where shall I find the party, my lord?"

"They were at Iddibal's farm, south by Gabes, and will still be somewhere near there. You must find them for yourself. Start at once." Rising, Baal-Azur took a small bag of money from a chest

and handed it to Bochar. "By the way," he said, "behind you will be fifty soldiers of the temple guard. If you want their help at any time, you can signal or send a message, but that you must arrange with them. After all, by this map," unrolling, as he spoke, the same map that Secharbas had consulted, "by this map, the way thither cannot be so long. There is but the land of the pygmies and then the ocean."

"If those children can do it, lord," said Bochar, "I can do it."

"Children?" asked Baal-Azur.

"Are they much more?" the man said carelessly. "The gold must needs be very precious."

Bochar said no more, but bowed and withdrew, leaving the other two looking at each other.

"What did he mean?" asked Maharbal uneasily. "Did he mean anything?"

Baal-Azur laughed. "I think they all go to their death; but it is worth the chance. If they reach the Place-of-Gold, we gain . . . "

"Supposing Bochar is able to return . . . "

"And if they never reach it, Hannibal loses the gold, which we really do not need."

"Gold is always useful and desirable."

"But the treasure chests of Moloch are full of it."

"For which Hannibal would have given his right hand!"

"Rather than Hannibal should have had it, I would have cast it into the sea," said Baal-Azur darkly, "for without gold he cannot make war and bring on us the wrath of Rome!"

CHAPTER XI

INTO THE DESERT

THE way led through hardish ground covered sparsely with grey-green camel food, with here and there a thorny acacia tree; but beyond the first oasis they could see the real desert, with wave after wave of unbound sands. Rai rested his little caravan at the oasis, intending to encamp there and to negotiate with the people for dried dates, the last of their dried stock as the fresh crop was not quite ripe, and a supply of a certain prepared food made of different kinds of meal, boiled and then baked hard. It could be scraped into flour and would keep almost indefinitely.

Balin, watching from the edge of the shallow valley of the oasis, saw a troop of horsemen coming at a gallop from the north. In front, with a lead of a hundred yards, was another man on a racing camel. Balin called Rai, and they watched with anxious eyes, fearing their persecutors had found them again. Then Gilla joined the two, and some of the men of the oasis as well.

"They chase the man in front," said Gilla.

"See, he sees us and has hope . . . "

"They slacken. They also see us. Brothers, come, show yourselves. They fear to follow too close, lest we be too many for them."

"Ah, he knows not that they are stopping! His beast staggers; it falls. The man is up! He runs!"

Three or four men of the oasis dashed out to meet the fugitive, who reached the oasis breathless. The horsemen, shaking their spears above their heads, turned and rode away; and Rai and Balin looked at each other in some surprise. They were too much relieved, however, to question this sudden retreat, and were ready to receive the fugitive.

Some of the villagers went out to recover his pack, and Balin accompanied them. They found

the camel bleeding from a deep cut in its flank and nearly dead; the men, however, said it could be revived, and as it was evidently a valuable beast, they were anxious to remain and do it.

Balin went back slowly to the village, frowning thoughtfully. He felt that something was wrong somewhere, but he could not see how. He looked long, when he arrived, at the fugitive, a little round-faced trader who was pouring himself out in gratitude to Rai for saving his life.

"Nonsense, man," said Rai at last, impatiently. "It was these villagers who saved you, apparently just by being here. Thank them."

The trader turned to find Balin's eyes fixed searchingly upon him.

"I've seen that little man before, I wish I could remember where," said Balin later to Rai.

"He looks harmless enough," answered Rai.

And so he did, busy as he was in making friends with the desert people, setting his pack under a tree, taking a shelter for himself, and preparing his own evening meal. He chattered as he did so with an interested ring of children who stood around watching him and shaking with laughter. In half an hour he was showing Rai's men how

to improve the camp and giving hints to the cooks, and all with the cheeriest good humor.

The next morning, as Rai was busy making up the packs and rather at a loss, because this business was utterly strange to him, Bochar — for that, he said, was his name — followed him around quietly, dropping useful hints in a casual way, helpful, cheerful, and ready. He asked Rai to buy the contents of his pack, toys and trinkets that he had planned to take into Numidia for barter. Then the troop they had seen had tried to rob him, he said, and he had only escaped by flight, as they had seen.

"These articles will be useful to your lordship," he said. "Wild people love this sort of thing, and food will doubtless often have to be bought along your way. Of course, coins mean nothing to them."

Such an idea was new to Rai, and he looked at the pack with interest, as the trader displayed his wares. There were squares of gaudy cloth, necklaces of bright beads and shells, small mirrors of tin with a flawed turquoise or two set in the handle, little carved wooden figures, bronze rings, a hundred glittering trifles, made by cunning workmen out of cheap materials for the trade

with savage tribes all over the known world which the men of Carthage carried on so well.

From their shelter Ronwen and Ceara caught the glitter of a necklace as the trader held it up, and came nearer to look. Ceara was plainly fascinated by it, and the trader saw her eagerness.

"You see?" he said to Rai.

Balin, who had heard enough to know that these things were supposed to appeal only to savages, gave Ceara a tremendous frown.

Elissa, who had come out by this time, was quick to understand and called out kind-heartedly, "Oh, how pretty! That is just what I want." She picked out a small wooden box with the lid carved like a lotus. "Rai, you must let us each have something for luck." She set a blue-and-white comb in Ronwen's hair and slipped the necklace over Ceara's head, and Argia, her maid, also received a comb.

An expression flitted over Bochar's face that puzzled Balin, who saw it. "The noble ladies — they are not going?" he asked sharply.

Rai looked surprised, but nodded.

"Not yonder with you?" insisted the man, with a frown that sat oddly on his round face.

"Yes," said Rai briefly.

Presently the trader made a request somewhat diffidently. He asked to be allowed to join the caravan and go forward with them. Rai not only agreed at once, but did so with a feeling of satisfaction.

"He may be a tremendous help," he said to Balin.

"I wish I could remember where I have seen him," was all that Balin answered.

In a few days Bochar was so much at home and such a help, that they scarcely knew how they had done without him.

Day after day the camels plodded along, the center of an unchanging circle of sand, covering three miles an hour for eight hours a day; the only break, the change of light; no sound except the noise of their own motion; nothing to be seen but sand. First went the caravan donkey, which led the string, lest the leading camel should go to sleep on its feet. The desert man, whom they hired from each oasis to be their guide to the next, rode on this first camel and often sang as he jogged along, for the same reason. Then came Chabrias and Gilla, who had formed a strange friendship,

perhaps because Gilla liked to listen to the rolling lines of Greek that Chabrias amused himself by chanting, though he understood no word of it, or perhaps for the sake of the stories that Chabrias would afterwards translate in simple language that Gilla could understand.

Bochar followed; then came Elissa and Ronwen; then Ceara and Argia; then Belus and Jair, the two sons of Abu; lastly rode Rai and Balin; behind them plodded the baggage camels in charge of the camel men.

Once they were met by a sandstorm and had to lie flat, half-smothered, until it was over; more than once they were short of water and had to go on rations; and often their camps had to be made where sunset found them, in the bare sand. When they reached an oasis, whether a large one, with a desert tribe in possession, or a small one bearing just a spring and a few palm trees, they always camped; and then their evenings were happy. The camels lay well to windward with the camel men around a fire of their own; bales were stacked up to make a shelter, cloths were hung between the trees for the sake of the girls; a good fire was set going, a hot meal

eaten, and then they would sit and listen to one of the countless tales that Chabrias had in store or to Argia as she played her lute while she and Ceara sang, for, although the latter was only fourteen, she sang sweetly and well. Sometimes they just talked until the sky flamed with stars, and, if it were moonlight, until the air seemed to grow cold with the blue-white flood of light; then they rolled themselves in their blankets and slept.

Sometimes there were outcrops of rock, and with such rocks there were often deep wells, dug years before with great labor and covered from the drifting sands with stone walls and arched roof. By one of these Rai was almost bitten by a snake. It darted its head from a crevice in the rock behind him as he sat resting, and Bochar caught it with his bare hand, whirled it round his head, and let it fly out into the desert.

Sometimes there were shallow depressions that had once been water courses, and here they found water by digging. This was always welcome, for the people of the fertile valleys were often unwilling to spare them much.

Here and there were hills, where the sand was left behind for a time and the grey-green bush

took its place. On such elevations there would be life: a troop of great birds would dance past in the distance, ostriches Bochar said they were; a gazelle would raise its head to look at them, and an arrow would stop it in its flight, for fresh food was too much needed for them to spare it; a jackal would bark at night; they even thought they heard the deep roar of a lion, though the sound might have been the boom of an ostrich.

Then they came upon the salt lands and, at the advice of Bochar, who had at some time in his life been to the far west country, where the giant apes lived and the trees bled white milk that turned to rubber, they filled some bags with salt. Elissa filled her wooden box and carried it in her little bag, for she did not care to use the common store. All along that western coast beyond Senekal, Carthage had trading posts, and Bochar had visited some of them and had many tales to tell of the forest people.

"The people that dwell in the forests love salt," he said, "and from what I have heard, there are forests where we go."

A few days later, they were plodding along as usual, the long blue shadows on their left hand

doubling the column as the sun drew level across the flat. Chabrias leaned back and spoke softly to Gilla. "Look and see what that is on the hillock to the left. Is it a man?"

Gilla turned his head and gave a swift glance. "It is a man," he answered. "A rider, with a pointed hat and a long spear. Shall I tell the Chief?"

"There is only one rider?"

"Only one."

"Then don't say anything. There are birds ahead; we are nearing an oasis."

Chabrias was troubled, but he knew the camels could not be made to quicken their pace, and there was nothing to be done until they reached the oasis. He looked back along the line. All had thrown off the cloths they wore over their heads during the heat of the day to protect them from the sun; they were nearly half asleep, tired as usual after the long monotonous jogging. No one else had noticed the threatening figure on the hill. It was threatening; Chabrias felt sure of that, as the waves of heat, still quivering in the air, seemed to make it loom enormous and the spear point caught the sunset light.

The rider watched for some minutes and then disappeared; and half an hour later the caravan was passing between the small hills that marked the bounds of the shallow fertile oasis valley.

As the camels knelt with tired grunts and the riders rolled off, weary, too, and stiff, Chabrias told Rai quickly of the apparition.

"I thought we were lucky to be left in peace so long," said Rai.

Rai greeted the headman of the little tribe and told him what Chabrias had seen.

"The gods of the desert be good to us!" ejaculated the man. "'Tis the People-of-the-Mountain! This means a raid."

"To-night?"

"Nay, they do not need to come at night; they fall upon us in the day, drive off half our kids and lambs, take half the date harvest, and anything else they fancy. Who are we to deny them?"

"Are they very many?"

"Many great men, they are, with strong weapons, very fierce men," said the headman bitterly.

"Will you help us if we defend the valley?"

"It is useless — they are too many," said the headman, and he begged earnestly that if these

lords must fight, they would please be so good as to do it outside the oasis.

"Who are these men?" asked Rai.

"When our fathers came here from the East, there was then water, like unto a lake, over that land you have just passed, where lies the salt, and these people lived on the shores of that lake. But the water dried away, and they went to live, so the tale runs, in the mountain yonder. It is said that they dwell in a great place of stone houses."

"And they live by robbery?"

"Aye, so it is," said the man nervously, "but if we do not resist them, they leave us half our goods."

Then, with a manner half-cringing and half-threatening, he begged Rai again to go on. "If there is a fight here, and some of the Men-of-the-Mountain are killed, we shall have to pay," he said.

Rai felt that there certainly would be a fight, and aside from the fact that these people would suffer, he saw that not only could he expect no aid from them, but that he would probably be hindered from participating.

"Very well," he answered, "we will go on, but

you must provide us with fresh camels, keeping ours in exchange."

This the man agreed to do. Then it was found that the camel men refused to go farther. They were safe here; the People-of-the-Mountain had nothing to win from them; and anyway they had never intended to go beyond this point.

"Yes," put in the headman, "south there is nothing good, only devils. Never do the caravans go beyond here. They turn to the west, where there is a large place of many houses. Moreover the People-of-the-Mountain would stop them, were they to go on."

However by dint of giving them good pay and promising them more when they reached the next oasis, Rai managed to induce four young men from this village to drive on the new camels. With only a pause for food, the packs were transferred, the weary girls roused and helped to mount, and off the caravan plodded again, poor little Io, the donkey, gamely leading.

CHAPTER XII

MEN-OF-THE-MOUNTAIN

THEIR only guide now was the stars, and the leading camel man had to sing all the time as they plodded on in order to keep the caravan together. When half the night was gone, Rai stopped the train and made a camp. Two little fires of camel chips were all the comfort they had, but all except the camel man were too tired to keep awake. Bochar, however, volunteered to keep watch and, when all were asleep, he heaped dry pieces of bush he had brought under his cloak from the valley on the fire and made a blaze. As soon as it flared up, three times he held his cloak in front

of it and then took it away. When he had done this, he put sand on the fire and then sat down, wrapped in his cloak, to watch.

They were up and on again with the first light, after a breakfast of dates and sour milk which they had bought from the headman — not an appetizing meal but a most sustaining one.

At noon, looking behind them for the twentieth time, they had a glimpse of figures on a sandy hill, and again, half an hour later, they saw them on a ridge they had passed but two hours before. The pursuers were gaining rapidly. The desert stretched without a break as far as eye could see; nowhere was there any shelter. So, coming to a large flat sand hill, Rai called a halt. The camels were led grunting to the top of this and made to lie down side by side and close together; then a rampart, made of bales, continued the line. They had a number of woollen blankets, for the nights were sometimes very cold, and also rugs of thick camel's-hair; these could be made into bags and filled with sand. Argia had sewing materials; she found four thick needles and some thread, and four of the party sewed patiently; and as soon as

one sack was roughly finished, it was filled with sand, the only thing they had in unlimited quantities. Then the thread gave out; but Elissa with a laugh unbound her hair, Argia cut some of it close, and then they twisted several hairs together and went on sewing, in a fire of laughing words and jests. Bochar looked wonderingly at them all and began to jest, too, as he scooped sand into the makeshift sacks, his jests funnier than the others', his laughter as gay as any one's. The camel men were frankly puzzled.

"What fly has bitten them?" they asked each other.

When this rather inadequate rampart was finished, they had another meal of sorts. Then the girls were put in the center of the square in charge of the precious waterskins. The whole available supply of arrows, not too large a one at best, and all the darts they could muster, were piled up ready to hand; and as by this time the pursuers were approaching, the defenders took their positions, two to a side, and the camel men together on the south side, which was steeper and less likely to be attacked.

There were about forty of the enemy, very large

men they all appeared to be, with curious peaked helmets of leather and brass and shields with brass bosses that caught the rays of the sun and dazzled their opponents' eyes. They rode up to the mound and made threatening gestures, evidently demanding a surrender, but no one understood what they said. No answer was made. Then the leader waved his hand, and the front rank men loosed their arrows. Some flew too high, some buried themselves in the sacks, letting out a trickle of sand; there was the squeal of an indignant camel as one grazed its back. The defenders withheld their own fire until the back rank men rode through and bent their bows while the front men prepared to shoot. Then Balin and Rai, in front, shot steadily, and struck two of the foemen through the throat, the only part left uncovered.

They saw the next flight of arrows coming and dodged them, rising again to shoot once more into the moving mass. This time one man fell. Then the leader spread his men out to right and left, surrounding the little fort, and all six of the defenders were drawn into the fight, Bochar using the darts with great effect. The enemy then charged the sand hill, reaching upward with their

spears but rather getting in each other's way. Some of them, however, got a footing in the sliding sand, and then it was hand to hand fighting over the packs, stab, and lunge, while Gilla stunned more than one with a great club. Ronwen and Ceara meanwhile had seized the discarded bows and, standing up, were shooting with calm precision, while Elissa and Argia gathered up the spent missiles. Even the camel men grew brave before their example and, drawing big knives, fought fiercely. Stab, lunge, recover, blindly sometimes as the shield bosses struck the sun into their eyes—the members of the caravan were fighting desperately for their lives. Then all at once they found they were fighting the air and, dashing the wet from their dripping faces, they saw the attackers had withdrawn to the shade of another hill just beyond arrow shot. Not one of the caravan, though, but had a gash somewhere. Chabrias had suffered a really deep wound in the right arm; Belus had a cut on the shoulder. These wounds were dressed and bound up, a waterskin was passed round, and they looked at each other and drew breath.

Apparently the attackers had no intention of

taking themselves off altogether, and Rai wondered if the caravan could repel another attack. Neither Chabrias nor Belus could fight as well as before, if they could do so at all; they were still outnumbered, even counting the camel men, three to one, and would never have been successful if the raiders had not been fighting on an upward slope and on sliding sand at that.

The leader of the Mountain Men seemed to think that he might as well camp here, perhaps starve out the defenders, perhaps attack them again under cover of the night. So, instead of ordering immediate attack, which would most likely have been fatal to the besieged, he allowed his men to make fires and prepare a meal. They were not used to such fierceness in defense, their victims generally giving in meekly to oppression and theft.

The little party on the sand hill was not in an enviable position. It had been very hot all day, so much so that even the Carthaginians, used to heat, felt it; the camels were not pleasant neighbors in such close quarters; their wounds, slight or not, were burning; and worst of all, to every one but Bochar, was the apparent hopelessness of

their future. Sooner or later they must be overwhelmed, if not by these men, then by reinforcements; their water must give out and also their food; their ammunition also certainly would fail. Rai thought of the night, with the enemy creeping up the sand hill unseen, to spring upon them with deadly force, and his heart sank. The poor girls, they should not be here — and yet what else could he have done but bring them? They would have been in constant danger at home. There had been a fierce sort of enjoyment in the fight, but now Rai was feeling cold. If only Mago had been there! He told himself that he was a coward. Then a hand fell on his shoulder, and Bochar pointed with his other hand to the north. Winding along over the sands, now hidden and now in sight, was a dark line of men.

"More enemies!" said Rai.

They watched in a fascinated silence while the line drew nearer. The raiders below had not seen them yet. Two of them, who had drawn fairly near, were amusing themselves with seeing who could shoot closest to the bobbing head of a camel that was weaving about in the midst of the square. Then Bochar suddenly burst into a loud long-

drawn yell, waving his sword above his head, and as though this was a signal, which indeed it was, the newcomers swept down upon the mountain raiders. They were riding dromedaries and therefore were swift and sure in their charge. Taken by surprise, the raiders put up a feeble fight and were soon routed, fleeing over the sands to be overtaken and killed separately.

Then the victors returned to the caravan. Rai called to his men to stand to arms, for he was not at all sure that all was well; but the troop halted below, and the captain shouted something in a strange language.

"What says he?" he asked Chabrias, who shook his head.

"Shall I speak to them?" said Bochar. "I know their speech."

Rai nodded.

"You have done well," said Bochar. "But you are late. Did you see my fire?"

"No, the people of the valley told us of your plight. But all is not over. The People-of-the-Mountain are not of those who let their folk be killed and say naught."

"Therefore you will still ride behind us, and

at all costs — at all costs — prevent them from following."

"To our limit it shall be done," the captain replied sullenly; and turned to make camp on the spot from whence he had chased the others.

"The newcomers are men of Mauretania, the Land of the Sunset," said Bochar, "and they have a long feud with the Men-of-the-Mountain and followed these to cut them off. Right well they have done it." Not an expression of his round rosy face told that he was lying.

The little party were glad to get out of their cramped quarters and make camp, too, though they chose another hollow and kept guard all night. At daybreak they rode on their way, always to the south, leaving the "Mauretanians" behind, thankful for their timely aid but hoping they would not see them again.

At evening of the next day they came to the edge of falling ground, looking over a space covered thinly with acacias. And the day after they saw acacias all the way, dusty-looking, with ugly red and white bark, but still trees and a relief after a thousand miles or so of desert. There was gum on the acacias, and Gilla took a fancy to taste it.

He halted his camel under a tree and reached up to gather some. Then he gave a sudden roar of surprise and pain, and the others turned to look.

"There's a green devil in that tree!" cried Gilla, half-laughing.

As they looked up, they saw in the branches gray-green, or green-gray monkeys with black faces, quite ready to resent any attempt to rob their trees of their favorite gum.

There was a different feel in the air now, and the travellers began to see birds in flight, so many that Bochar said there must be much water about. Then they came to reedy, marshy ground, where it was muddy under foot and where frogs, flamingoes, marabouts, and teal abounded. One of the camel men got a great fright when, squelching along in the mud, his beast suddenly seemed to go mad and upset him, and he fell off right in front of a huge, hideous creature that turned upon him with a sweep of a powerful tail. He rolled out of its way in time to escape this, but the thing charged him, with a snap of its jaws, and would have seized him had not Rai put an arrow into its eye and, as it lashed about, another into its soft under part.

"Surely there are devils in the south!" the man said devoutly as he climbed back on to his camel, having quieted it with difficulty. He had never before seen a crocodile.

As they sat on their swaying beasts, their heads alone were above the reeds. Clouds of birds rose before them and settled again behind them, and as far as they could see, there spread a waving, whispering sea of green and brown.

The camel men were terrified by the sight; never in their lives had they imagined anything like it. Things moved out of sight; once there was a strange noise like the shaking of rugs, with odd rumblings and sucking noises; and all the reeds shook.

"Elephants!" said Chabrias, who had seen them in Hannibal's army as part of the panoply of war.

As he spoke, the huge forms of elephants, with ears flapping to scare the flies, filed into view in a bare space.

"More devils!" whispered the camel men.

"No more devils than are these," said Chabrias, pointing to the camels. "Get on, we want to be out of this, before dark."

On they struggled, and they were able to pass through the seemingly endless rows of reeds only because it was the dry season and the mud was beginning to cake. At last, suddenly, they came out upon the shores of a great stretch of water that reached to the horizon.

CHAPTER XIII

"A LARDER!"

HAVE we come to the ocean again?" exclaimed Belus. He stooped and tasted the water. "No, it is fresh water."

"Is this one of the lakes shown on the jewel map?" said Rai to Chabrias in a low voice. "It cannot be, though; we have not gone southward enough for that."

"This place is nothing but a larder!" cried Jair, in excitement, as skirting the shores toward the east, they came to a space of rising ground where the reeds retreated and gave place to grass and trees. Buck were feeding here and scarcely

troubled to move away. Guinea fowl were calling, wild geese were on the lake, and the travellers could hear now and then the *plop-plop* in the water that marked the rise of fish.

"It is almost too much!" said Belus, happily, and Gilla's eyes shone with pleasure.

Belus and Jair were no hunters; so they and Bochar stayed to make camp, while the others went out to get food and Chabrias kept guard. They returned in a short time with guinea fowl and a fat young reed buck, which were soon prepared and on the coals. Oh, how delicious the fresh food tasted! Elissa said she never wanted to see dried dates again and expressed every one's feeling.

They hung out the blankets, after they had been ripped open and the sand well beaten out, in such a way as to make tents of them, and, after another scare from a crocodile, they drew water and were able to indulge in a thorough bathing.

The situation was not perfect, of course; the ground was hard, and swarms of mosquitoes annoyed them until they lit a smudge.

Not one of them had ever been in similar circumstances, and it did not occur to them that if

the parklike glade held such a store of game, it probably held other beasts. In the middle of the night they were awakened by a tempest of noise, growls, squeals of frightened camels, and the loud bray of the little Io. Rai and Balin rushed to the dying fire and each seized a brand. Balin held his up to search the darkness, while Rai kicked the logs together and laid on more wood.

The growling continued, yet as every one was up and shouting, it moved off and with it went a sound as of something being dragged away; and as the fire burnt up, one of the camel men shouted that his camel had gone.

"I feared we had lost the donkey," said Ceara.

"Lions!" said Bochar.

Judging by the disturbance there must have been more than one. The travellers spent the rest of the night piling wood on the fires and vowed never to be caught off guard again.

In the morning the camel men stubbornly refused to go farther. This was a "magic land", they said, too good to be safe, and guarded, as magic lands always were, by devils. They might be thankful that only the camel had been taken.

As Rai had only hired them for the distance

which camels could go, and this was not camel country, he could not keep them. So they took food enough to last them to the nearest oasis and the rest of their pay and went back with their camels, shaking their heads.

Those left behind looked at each other. What were they going to do now? They eyed the packs and thought of having to carry them through whatever lay ahead. Then Balin had an idea.

"Why not use the water?" he said. "In my country they make boats of willow boughs, like baskets."

"Boats! Boats!" cried Rai. "Why, of course we can make boats, or rather Belus can, with our help. What do you say, Belus?"

"It could be done, Master Rai," replied Belus, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "I have tools as you know; I never go anywhere without my tools. But it will take time."

"We can camp here for a week — or two, if necessary," said Rai.

They chose another spot for the camp, on a slight rise, shaded with a few trees, not too far from the water and not too near. And this time,

before doing anything else, they cut saplings and boughs and made a fence.

Ronwen and Ceara knew how to prepare and cook meat, and they volunteered to run the kitchen department, while Elissa and Argia mended clothes and, having been shown how to weave the supple reeds into mats, did this also, to make awnings for the future boat, as the sun was daily growing hotter and hotter. Rai and Balin provided food; Bochar did a hundred odd jobs, helping every one in turn; and Jair helped his brother; while Chabrias, whose right arm was still in a sling, did all that he could with one hand. All were busy, and it was a happy time, unmarred by any unfortunate episode. Lions prowled about at night, but the fence kept them out of the camp, and even the mosquitoes were kept at a distance when Elissa opened one of her packets and sacrificed her gauze veils for nets.

Both Jair and Belus were carpenters, though only Belus had worked in a shipyard, and the boat building went on so well that in five days' time a craft was ready. It was a flat, wide vessel with a shallow draft. Poles were set up amidships

for the awning, and two pair of oars were provided.

The Lotus, as it was named with great ceremony, was a wonderful boat and did Belus much credit. Jair made a sort of crate for Io, the donkey, whom they could not and would not leave behind, and fixed it at the stern of the boat. All the baggage was piled on board; the mats were slung; Io was fixed in her cabin. Then the passengers went aboard. Gilla shoved off the boat and swung himself over the gunwale, and away went *The Lotus* across the lake.

They found innumerable islands, and though some of them were mere sand banks in the possession of huge loglike crocodiles and great creatures whose like none of the party had ever seen but which Chabrias called hippopotami, yet they generally managed to find one on which to camp at night.

On the second day a hippo, without any warning, rose just in front of *The Lotus.* The boat collided with him with a jar, and Bochar, who was standing up at the moment fixing the awning, fell overboard on the port side. Balin, being on that side, plunged after him almost as soon as he

struck the water. The hippo came between them and the boat which, to add to the complications, ran afoul of a sand bank and could not be worked off immediately. They also disturbed a crocodile, asleep half in and half out of the water. He slipped into the water and disappeared. Gilla and Jair stepped out on to the sand, as they were the strongest, intending to push *The Lotus* off, and Rai fitted an arrow to his bow. However, the tense situation was relieved in an unexpected way. The hippo suddenly charged the two in the lake, just as the crocodile made up *his* mind to do the same thing, and they met each other halfway, to their mutual disgust and fury. While they fought it out, Balin managed to reach the boat with Bochar in tow, and they were hauled in as Gilla, with a last push, succeeded in freeing *The Lotus*. He and Jair jumped in, and they rowed away as quickly as they could from the commotion in the water; not stopping to see which of the combatants won. The strangest part of this episode was that Bochar seemed to resent having been rescued and was in a vile temper for several days afterward.

They rowed for one hundred miles across that

lake and then, guided by a current that flowed into it, they came to the mouth of a wide river, and though if they went upstream, they must row against the current, it was not a strong one and they decided to continue their voyage.

Day after day slipped by in quiet and peace like the wooded banks themselves. Sometimes the travellers saw a buffalo or a rhinoceros or even a lion drinking at the stream; once for a whole mile the shore was white with egrets; again the whole sky was darkened by the flights of water fowl. There were still crocodiles and hippos, and shoals of fish.

Every few days they landed and made a proper camp, clearing the ground, building a fence, and making two little rooms with half doors screened with Elissa's gauze, of which they took great care as it made much difference in their comfort. Then some of them went inland to hunt, and the meat they brought back was dried and salted to last until they camped again. Gilla, fortunately, could dress hides and made thick-soled shoes to wear when they were ashore. The days in between their times of camping they slept on the boat, with flares burning to keep away the blun-

dering water beasts. Their diet was diversified by fruit of many kinds, for there was not a bush or tree or creeper in all the mass of vegetation that did not bear some kind of berry or fruit. Not all were edible, but they took of the kinds that the monkeys ate. Once they came upon a tree filled with black forms and thought they had at last come upon the human inhabitants of the land, until they saw that these creatures were monkeys, too. There were ground nuts also, and after seeing a patch rooted up by wild pigs, they tried to eat a few raw ones and were disappointed. Then Ceara, who was cook that day, roasted a handful as an experiment, and after that their first act after making camp was to search for these clover-like plants.

After a month or so of this life, Carthage seemed to have been in another world and time to have lost its meaning. But this experience came to an end, for the river began to narrow and the ground to rise, so that the party was forced to take to the shore. The boat, built of unseasoned wood, was beginning to warp, but they buried her and made a mark to show her resting place in case they came back that way some time. Then they made

smaller packs, one for each to carry and two for the donkey, and set off on foot.

There was a range of hills to be climbed, and after that the land stretched away in a limitless expanse, covered with the usual acacia scrub and dry grass. Toward the East the land showed signs of having been under water in the wet season, and this may have been the reason no people were there. The travellers were not sorry, for so far on the journey people had meant enemies.

They were still a happy company, and though they were often tired with the very great heat, not one of them was ill. Even Elissa, who in all her life before had never carried anything heavier than a flower or walked a step beyond her garden, bore a pack all day and never complained.

Then one day, as they went through the acacia-covered flat where elephant troops were often to be seen and carefully avoided or where a dark line crossed their path and was found to be an army of caterpillars marching from tree to tree and leaving devastation in its track, they came at last to the forest. Then a sound reached them that made them stop and look at one another.

"Drums!" said one. And drums it was.

CHAPTER XIV

DRUMS IN THE FOREST

MEN coming from the north!" shrieked the drums.

"Enemies coming — shall we stay and fight?"

"Run and hide — run and hide!" beat out the nearest drums.

"Stay and fight!" roared the farthest.

As the little party neared the forest, they heard the sounds coming from the dark cavern of the trees; and as it was almost sunset, they camped out on the open plain for the night. In the morning they went down into the forest which stretched

as far as eye could see on either hand. A single drum broke out again as they left the plain, and then there was dead silence. It was very eerie in the trees, as the sun showed only where there was a break in the thick green roof where lightning or decay had struck a mighty tree and sent it down upon its neighbors. In such a gap there would be a thick tangle of undergrowth below and a wild riot of flowering creepers above in a snaky bunch of twisting stems; but where there was no gap, there was only the carpet of fallen leaves or fallen trunks.

There was a continual movement going on overhead as birds and monkeys stirred in the upper branches or a snake slithered from bough to bough; but on the ground there was stillness and silence.

About noon they came to an extraordinary tangle of tree trunks piled upon one another at many angles, and Balin and Gilla both exclaimed at the same moment, "Axes!"

"You mean the trees have been cut down?" asked Rai.

"See," said Gilla, as he pointed out on one log the mark of chopping.

They halted to consider the matter, and because this barrier looked formidable, they decided to go around it. This was easier said than done, as the entrance of the light had encouraged the undergrowth to develop to its utmost. They had to turn back for a little way, and then made to the right, avoiding the tangle which they thought must be the defense of a village.

As they went, the drums began again.

"Men from the north are passing — passing!"

"Shall we follow and fight?"

"Nay, let them pass — let them pass!"

"They are very few — shall we catch and eat them?"

"Who knows how many follow? Let them pass — let them pass!"

"Listen to the drums!" whispered Elissa. "They are talking."

It was truly a weird unpleasant sound, and the girls, for all their bravery, were terrified. Every one was pleased when after a while the clamor ceased. Then a river which flowed from east to west and so was no use to them, barred the way and had to be crossed. They cut boughs, disturbing swarms of insects that at once began to bite

or sting. Gilla was about to cut down with one lusty chop a bough that bore a long lump of mud, interwoven with bits of straw and twigs, hanging from it, when luckily he changed his mind, or he would have brought a wasp's nest about their ears. Jair shook down a small snake, but it did not attack him. A raft was soon made and somehow they all were ferried across the river, to the great discomfort of Io, who did not like the nearness of the water.

Again they plunged into the forest, thick, gloomy, wet, and full of insects, for even the butterflies came in clouds.

Three or four days later they made their usual camp; and as game did not seem plentiful but had to be sought for, all the men except Chabrias and Bochar set off in different directions to find food.

Chabrias was beating a buffalo skin to soften it, while he recited to himself the "Death of Hector" from the Iliad, which seemed to help him in the operation. Bochar was making arrows with heads of bone; Ronwen, the cook of the day, was preparing for dinner some roots they had dug, in case the men came back empty-

handed; Argia was sewing a buckskin shirt; and Elissa and Ceara went down an open glade, lured by the gleam of a bright orchid on a distant tree. The ground was fairly free of brush; small flecks of light came from overhead and glanced on the leaves, while the wings of countless insects caught and reflected the gleam as they passed. On the right a small streamlet trickling over a fallen trunk, on its way to the river out of sight, made the only sound. The girls could see quite a distance all round, and having looked up into the trees for leopards and snakes, they saw nothing to make them pause.

The flower hung low, and Elissa cut its stalk with her small dagger, careful not to touch the tree and invite a stream of ants. Then away to the left they saw another. It seemed so peaceful a spot that without a thought of danger they ran to the second orchid. As Elissa reached up to cut it, a stifled cry from Ceara made her turn, and then a heavy skin fell over her head, and she was seized by gripping hands and carried along helpless and unable even to scream, half stifled in the smelly hide.

The forest swallowed them, and no sign would

ever have shown where they had gone, had not Ceara's necklace broken, and the carved, wooden, brightly colored beads slid silently one by one from inside her loose dress to the ground, unnoticed by those who carried her.

Incredibly quick they were hurried away, several of the men apparently leading the way, others carrying Elissa and Ceara. Before long the girls were set down and the bags removed from their heads. They found that they had come to an open space set with little houses that were not much more than heaps of boughs, covered with palm leaves, and that the whole tribe, men, women, and children alike, had gathered to look at them.

The girls at first had thought they had been taken by some of the chimpanzees they had become used to seeing in the fruit trees, but now they saw that their captors were men, little men about four feet tall.

"The pygmies!" said Elissa.

She could scarcely bring herself to be afraid of these small beings, until she looked at their faces, hideous, hard, and suspicious. The two girls

stared back, too proud to show fear before creatures like these, and there was something in their look that seemed to awe the pygmies, fierce as they themselves were. Ceara was hoping that all her beads had fallen and not been discovered by them, for she had felt them sliding down and thought they might be a trail for Gilla and Balin to follow.

The pygmies then took Elissa's bag and tugged at the strings, and all her treasures fell out — combs, little brushes, bodkins, ivory pins, the knife she used at meals in its silver case, her fire lighter, and the small wooden box of salt she always carried. This was closed and could only be opened by sliding back the carved lid. This did not interest the pygmies, and they threw it to the ground. Elissa bit her lip as all her things were disposed of in various ways as ornaments by the chief and his family. Ceara's bag, too, was opened and the contents shared similarly. Then a fierce dispute began, evidently as to what should be done with the captives, but it was interrupted by a meal which was to be eaten. The girls' hands were freed and raw meat given to them, which they could not eat, and some strange cakes of

raw meal, half sweet, half sour. There was no fire to be seen.

Elissa picked up her box and managed to take out some salt without showing the secret of the opening. She remembered what Bochar had said about the love of the forest people for salt. Handing some to Ceara on a leaf, she put the rest down by her side and dipped in it a bit of the cake. Bright, deep-set eyes watched her every movement, and presently a black finger dipped itself in the stuff and lifted it to a mouth. The taste was received with a grunt of satisfaction.

After that every one wished a taste, and the contents of the box soon vanished. Elissa made signs as well as she could that if they were taken back to the camp, all should have as much salt as they wanted; but apparently the pygmies were not yet ready to return their captives, for a great argument ensued. All were ready to talk, and matters rested as they were while they did so.

Suddenly Elissa sprang to her feet. "Ceara, look!" she gasped.

Ceara's eyes followed the pointing finger and to her horror she saw three old women of the tribe hanging by their hands from a branch

and a fourth lying on the ground, a mass of wounds.

The women of Carthage were trained to give their children to Moloch and to stand dry-eyed while they dropped through the brazen hands of the Image into the fire, but Elissa had no sympathy with such customs. In a moment she had crossed the space, snatched a spear from where it leaned against the tree, and cut the ropes.

The little men leaped to their feet, chattering with rage, and a few spears flew toward Elissa, perhaps half-heartedly as none touched her. Ceara rushed to Elissa's side, and the two faced the pygmies. Once again the lives of the two girls hung lightly on a hair. A puzzled look came to the little chief's face. What if these strange creatures were gods? He turned his head from side to side in perplexity, until all at once an idea seemed to occur to him. He began to make signs excitedly, watched intently by all his followers. Then they entered into the spirit of the play and began to act as well. Some piled bits of wood into a heap, some made the motions of leaping flames, others dragged the old women to the imaginary fire. Even the old women, reluctantly at first, then

eagerly, acted out parts. They sat around the imaginary fire, tending it, while all the rest of the tribe went away. Then the poor old things, sitting round the fire, began to nod and went to sleep, and the people came back to find the fire out. All that was plain to perceive, but what did it mean?

"Are they trying to tell us that they do not know how to make fire?" whispered Elissa. "It seems so. Yes, see, they have a clay bowl hung to a pole — yes, that is it, they are going into the forest to find fire."

"And they are asking us if we come from the tree-tops — no, the skies — to give them fire! What a good thing Rai gave us each a fire lighter and makes us always carry it!"

Elissa made signs for the chief to give her the fire lighter he had taken from her bag and had slung round his neck as an ornament. Ceara gathered tiny bits of wood, and added to them a scrap of her dress and dry leaves, and Elissa struck out a spark. The fire blazed up, and the girls fed it carefully. In a few minutes there was a proper fire burning in the center of the glade, and the pygmies were overwhelmed with surprise and pleasure. Another fierce argument immediately

began. The question, whatever it was, divided the pygmies into two groups. Finally one group seemed to win, for the tribe began to pack their belongings and make preparations for departure, to the bitter disappointment of the girls.

Back at the camp Bochar grew anxious as the two girls did not return and went to look for them. Then Chabrias heard his shout and hastened after him, and when Gilla and Balin arrived with a wild pig borne between them, they found the distracted men and Ronwen and Argia, calling and searching wildly.

Without more words they threw down their burden and joined in the hunt, going about the search, however, in a very different manner. Gilla and Balin each took a part of the space and searched it minutely, and it was not long before Gilla found one of Ceara's bright-colored beads. After that the tracking was not difficult. The light flitting of the pygmies would not as a rule have left a trace, but the burdens they carried made their feet sink into the thick leaf mould, and every now and then there appeared one of the useful beads. All at once they came to the

edge of the open space, bordered with the small huts, and saw the two girls sitting on a log at one side and the pygmy men and women moving about busily. Balin was able to walk right into the midst of them before he was seen, with Gilla close behind.

He shouted to draw their attention; and the children and women rushed to the huts, while the men picked up their bows. Balin held up empty hands, but Gilla behind, had an arrow trained on the chief, who did not miss this fact. He was a brave little man and faced the giant boldly, though his eyes were wide with fright.

The little chief eyed these two big strangers, with their hideous eyes and wonderful hair like the flowers of the thorn tree, and thought he would do well to make friends with them. He turned round to Elissa and made signs that he would take her back to her camp if she would give him the salt as she had promised. Elissa explained the situation to Balin, who nodded acquiescence. The pygmies would have carried the girls, but as they refused to be borne, they and the chief walked away, followed by Balin and Gilla, and then by the whole tribe.

As they neared the camp, Ceara with a happy thought lifted up her voice and sang one of Argia's songs. Then Balin took it up and chanted: "We are coming with a strange crowd. Be ready, but not too ready. Put the meat on the spit, but have your bows at hand."

Rai and the others had only just come in, bearing an eland, and were on the warpath, but fortunately they heard first Ceara's voice and then Balin's words, and realized that all was well.

Ronwen had gone on with the cooking, as there seemed little else for her to do, and as the absent ones would perhaps be hungry if they returned; so the pleasant smell of roast meat met the party. The smoky eyes of the little people grew brighter as they sniffed through their wide nostrils.

Greetings took place all round, and then the pygmies were given the eland, with a large lump of salt. They made a fire of their own and cooked the gift, of which they left little. Then they lingered there, listening to Argia as she thumbed her lute and watching Bochar perform some marvellous conjuring tricks. The little people crept nearer and nearer, until in fact they were almost too near, hardly knowing whether to be fright-

ened or only amazed at the way things appeared and disappeared; and when a shining round thing was put into one pygmy's ear and taken out of the open mouth of another, the two nearly came to blows and only were appeased when each was given a small coin. Bochar was a bit of a ventriloquist, too, and made the head of the wild pig hanging from a nearby tree talk, and gave a human voice to Io, who was a source of wonder even without the accomplishment. This was the last performance needed to secure their utter safety from attack by this tribe at least, for people who possessed such a powerful magician were not to be touched with impunity.

So fascinated were they that they did not depart until the girls went into their leafy hut and fastened the curtain across the door. They took the hint then and retired into the forest. The boys filled the doorway of the camp with a hurdle of boughs and went to bed, leaving Gilla to take the first watch.

CHAPTER XV

OUT OF THE TREES AT LAST

THE friendship with the pygmies continued, and when Rai was ready to move on, he laid sticks on the ground one in front of another, pointed to the south, to himself, to the little chief, and then to the south again.

"There, I hope he understands that," he said.

The pygmy ran a little way into the forest, pointed to the path, then to Rai, then pointed to a lump of salt, and held up two fingers. Rai nodded, the small chief snapped out some words to his people, and off the pygmies went.

The travellers followed and found their course much easier. The pygmies knew the best manner of making their way through the forest; they knew the edible berries and fruit, how to find honey, for the place was full of bees, what roots to use for scratches and sores; and they could lead the hunters upon game when apparently there was none within miles. Often they would have had to go without food had they not been so helped, or would have gone astray in the trackless tangle where there was nothing to guide them and the stars were not visible. Gilla, and in a measure Balin, had the savage sense of direction, but even they were sometimes at a loss at places where moss grew on all sides of a tree, rather than on only one, where there was no sun to be seen, and where, if the wind blew at all, it passed far over head. Two more months of slow travelling — for they could make little more than five miles a day, and there were, besides, the days they halted to camp and hunt — brought them to another river, wide and flowing sluggishly, and there they halted.

When they learned from the pygmies that there was more forest beyond, for countless miles,

they thought, it was decided to build another boat and proceed by water.

"After all," said Chabrias, "this kind of country cannot go on forever. Rivers almost always rise in a mountain, and as it is a mountain we seek, why not go up the river? It flows east now, but perhaps will turn south ere long."

At least on the water they would have open sky above them, and not the close roof of leaves that kept in the heat of the sun while keeping out its light, that kept the air so hot that sometimes it seemed as if their very bones would melt. So for a week they camped while trees were cut, planks were sawed and planed, holes bored in them and the planks joined by wooden pegs, the work of boat building going on more easily this time because they all were more used to work. Belus had stuck to his tools like a hero. It was a matter of pride with all of them that not a thing should be missing from any pack when they came to the end of a day's journey or a day's work. They dare not trust anything to the pygmies to carry lest temptation should prove too strong for them.

The small people watched the building of the boat with curious and interested eyes and a great

deal of chattering. The day the craft was ready Rai and Balin went off to shoot something that would occupy the pygmies with a feast and give them a chance to get away in peace.

Some of the pygmy hunters, all excitement, volunteered to lead them to game, and after talking together in their clicking language, they went stealthily down one of the forest paths, turning every now and then to make hideous faces of warning to be quiet at the boys who, not aware of making a sound, were rather annoyed at the contortions. After some time of this slow progress, noises all too familiar reached them, and they stopped and made frantic signs. In a few moments they reached the edge of a large natural clearing which, flooded with sunlight, seemed like a lighted stage after the gloom of the forest. The place was full of elephants, feasting luxuriously on the fruit of large trees encircling the place, and quite unaware of human presence. But a small bird, a honey guide that had flitted before them all the way, burst out of the bush with a cry, and the great gray beasts melted silently into the farther trees.

As the last one, a huge bull, was disappearing,

one of the pygmies, unable to bear this sorry loss, dashed out into the glade and began to yell insults at the elephant at the top of his by no means small voice, at the same time casting a spear at the retreating creature which happened to hit the beast in a tender spot. The elephant whipped about and charged with outspread trunk, shrieking furiously. The pygmy, instead of rushing for the trees, tore round the glade, the elephant after him. As the pair came by for the second time, Rai and Balin planted their bows, drew string, and the next second two arrows buried themselves in the bull's side. He checked, rocked on his great legs, then whipped about to face the new danger, not seeing the boys in the shadow of the trees. They saw their chance and took it. Rai had often enough listened in far-off Carthage to his grandfather's old hunter, Phra, as he talked of his hunting days, and he knew the best and quickest way to kill.

"Aim for the hollow of the temple," he whispered, and their sharp metal-tipped arrows struck simultaneously in the very center of the elephant's brain; while a cloud of pygmy spears flew also. Two movements of the boys' steady hands, and two more arrows followed. They proved too

much; the great bull sank gently to his knees, with trunk outstretched, and then fell over on his side with an earth-shaking thump. The boys turned away as the pygmies broke into the glade with joyful shouts.

"Whew!" whistled Rai, wiping his forehead.

The tribe soon arrived on the scent of food and camped on the spot; but they could not resist after all seeing their friends depart. The little men brought gifts of honeycomb, fruit, and berries, receiving in exchange squares of gay cloth, the two promised lumps of salt, and some glittering tin mirrors. The small chief presented Gilla, as the largest man and the one having the most wonderful hair, with a whistle, or bird call, made of bone, saying something earnestly in his own clicking language. Gilla offered him a bronze ring, but he coveted a lock of his orange-colored hair, and as soon as Gilla understood this, he cut a liberal lock and handed it over. The pygmy said something in acknowledgment. He said the same about the bone whistle and frowned when the travellers did not understand. Then he snatched the whistle back, crouched down, ran, crouched down again, and pointed his bow, pretended to be

knocked over, rose, crawled behind a bush, and piped a call on the whistle. Some of his retinue, who had been watching this pantomime with grave attention, darted out, put an imaginary enemy to flight, and running to the bush, lifted up the chief, who danced a dance of joy and triumph.

"He means, of course, that if you blow the whistle when you are in danger, if there are any pygmies within hearing, they will come to your help," said Elissa. "Don't you see? It's as plain as can be."

"If you say so," remarked Rai politely.

Gilla took back the precious bone, and then they all went on board their new craft.

As poor Io was put into her cage, Bochar made her speak a last farewell, and the pygmies, who did not quite know whether to like this or not, shrank back, giving them all a chance of pushing off without any of the little people on board.

The miles and the days went on again, with the difference that this was a wider river, a thicker forest, another air altogether. Hardly a day passed without some adventure, sometimes unpleasant and occasionally funny, happening to one or another of the party; never an hour went

by without bringing some sight of new bird or butterfly or beast, flights of bats at sunset, or parrots at dawn, or a going-to-bed flock of gaily-hued little bee-eaters in a reedy place. Now and then, where a sand bank blocked half the river or an island filled the middle space, they would float under a green tunnel, as the big yellowwood trees grew so pressed down by the crowding ranks of trees behind them that they lay almost flat out over the water, with forty feet or so of length instead of height. Perhaps along a fifty-mile stretch there would be a string of two or three villages by the river; along another fifty there would be no break in the thick green forest wall.

The travellers came at last to a place where the river branched off to the south and they followed this branch. The villages continued, but they hardly ever saw the inhabitants, as the villages chanced to lie along the banks at the full width of the river, and they never landed where there were any signs of human occupancy. Only once were they chased, half-heartedly, by a canoe load of warlike negroes.

Twice they used the bone bird call, when their stock of food was very low and no game was to be

seen anywhere. Then they laid out salt on plates of leaves and a few glittering presents on a square of red cloth in an open space and waited quietly till the pygmies, who answered the call, stole up with suspicious looks and threatening gestures. Bochar had managed to learn a few words of the language from the first tribe, as he was a ready linguist, and the little people guided them to the presence of game.

On and on went the river, on and on continued the forest, and the days drifted into weeks. "Soon we must come to the end of the world," they said. They were weary of the forest and longed heartily for the open plain, the free air, and space in which to stretch their limbs.

The more they saw of this apparently limitless forest land, the less grew their hope of ever meeting Mago. Their only chance of coming upon him seemed to lie in finding the Place-of-Gold. Bochar sometimes wondered what had become of his fifty followers. Had they been overpowered by the People-of-the-Mountain or escaped from them only to fall victims to the thousand other dangers of the way? He worried little about the end of the journey, though; there was time enough

for that when the end came and the men had failed to appear.

The land rose now, and there were rapids in the river and rocky gorges, so that they were forced to leave their boat and again take to the forest. But at last they looked out from the trees on to a plain, and they stopped and gazed as though they could not look enough.

Elissa, Ceara, and Argia simply wept for joy; Ronwen, throwing her arms above her head, broke into a dance. Gilla capered with great leaps, and the others shook hands.

Bochar turned and bowed to the forest. "Farewell," he said, "and may we never meet again!" And he pretended to shake the dust from his shoes. At this feeble jest they all laughed with gay relief.

As they walked on, they drew deep breaths of sparkling air. Herds of game, among them some giraffes, were feeding on the grassy plain, where trees rose singly here and there and where there were small round hills, like piles of rocks, covered with earth and set like watchtowers at intervals. With one consent they made camp by one of these hillocks, where there was a spring, and

spent hours just looking about them. There was something strange in the tall beautifully-colored giraffes, which they had never seen before. When Balin and Gilla, the most restless of the party, set off to hunt, Elissa gave them instructions not to kill "the pretty creatures with the long necks."

CHAPTER XVI

THE STAND AT THE PASS

FOR a month again they travelled, always southward, avoiding populated places if they could, but often entertained royally in a happy village, set here on the slope of a hill in the shade of big trees or there on the bank of a river. The people were free and fearless, well-fed and hospitable, for the blighting influence of the slave trade was far in the future. Inter-tribal warfare they had, when slaves were taken by the conquerors, but there were no ruthless marauders to make them hate and fear strangers.

As the travellers went farther south, they came across people who had heard of the great lakes and pointed to the east, but the name Monofutana was unknown to them.

It had long been decided among the travellers that before looking for the valley of Lulala, guarded by the Red and the White Mountains, they must find the "Thundering Smoke", marked on both maps. That lay between them and their destination. They might find Mago there.

One morning they saw a line of smooth green hills with rocky summits, standing out against a brilliant cloudless sky. Lower down there was a great tree with outspread branches and a group of conical huts. In the foreground was a pile of rocks, with a patch of reeds at its foot where a flock of small agitated birds was fluttering.

A number of black figures burst from the reeds as though shot from a catapult and doubled back around the rocks. Then there appeared a human being walking and looking back.

"Ah!" cried Belus. "That is a man!"

From the reeds bounded forth a great yellow beast, with a black-tipped mane and lashing tail. The man drew his string and there was a twang

that the watchers could hear from where they stood, fascinated.

"Baal! His string has gone!" Jair said, in an awed voice.

At the first sight of the fleeing man Rai and Balin had unslung and strung their bows, fitting arrows to the notch, but quicker than either, Bochar's knife, held flat to his hand and sent with a backward fling, flickered across the space, hitting the lion on a foreleg and causing him to turn aside to look about for his enemy and to see the group above. In that moment the arrows buried themselves to the feather in his side. He gave a great coughing roar and charged, tail out, upon the group, but another arrow met him in mid-air as he leaped, and struck him dead.

There was never a man more astonished than the one they had saved. He came toward them, saluted, and made a speech of gratitude, or so they understood it to be by its tone. He was a very tall, well-formed, brown-skinned native, with good features, and a proud, intelligent air, and he was young.

"Egyptian blood somewhere in his lineage," said Chabrias half to himself.

"Tola!" the man said, touching himself on the breast, and made signs that they should follow him to his village. They stayed there at his urgent request, made by signs, for a few days, and then they had to remain for a week or two more, as Ceara had an attack of fever, caused, the old women said in pantomime, by going through the wet grass before the sun had warmed the chilly morning air. They had risen thousands of feet since leaving the river, and the nights and early mornings were cool.

Ceara was very miserable for a few days, but she had care and attention, and so many nurses offered themselves that Ronwen and Elissa had difficulty in declining their services. They found a way out of the dilemma by installing an old woman who had taken their fancy by her twinkling eyes and the humorous kindly wrinkles of her walnut brown face. She snapped her fingers in the faces of the other women and kept them out of the large hut that Tola had had built for the girls.

While they waited, Tola became attached to the men folk, took them hunting and learned a few words of their language, teaching them some

of his, so that between the two tongues they could make themselves somewhat understood.

Tola's country was a large one, for he was a conqueror in his way and several tribes owed him allegiance; and when he heard that his guests wanted to reach the place called Monofutana, he sent for a man who came from the south. This man repeated the word, then gave it a different intonation and said he knew it; and on being questioned further, he offered to lead them thither. Tola himself declared his intention of going with them, and after some talk Rai induced Elissa and Ronwen to agree to remain at the village in the care of Chabrias and Bochar, while he and the rest went on.

Tola was followed by a hundred warriors, and there were carriers as well, so that Rai's party travelled in state, not carrying anything but their weapons and even able to ride if they wished, for there were oxen mounts. The travellers, however, were so used to marching by this time, that they strode along gaily in the exhilarating air.

The next day they came to the edge of the plateau and looked down upon a flattish country threaded with the gleam of many streams, marked

with patches of open forest, rising on the right into hills and then into mountains, and sinking on the left to marshes. Here, Tola said, the tall reeds grew to the height of an elephant, and no man could penetrate far into this region where the pale gray of the tall crested cranes and the rosy pink of flamingoes made a shifting fringe and the hippos undisturbed grew to an enormous size, with pythons and crocodiles making the place more hazardous for man.

Here and there against the feathery green of the trees in the middle land, they saw the chestnut brown of sable and the smoky blue of eland; and here and there a bush or tree gleamed red as rubies in every leaf, while a patch of vivid yellow or a flush of purple showed where spring was beginning to cover the burned ground with flowers. The travellers looked in wonder at the scene.

Then Tola with a word made them notice how the game began to be uneasy, as the sentinels of the quagga, on the knolls, lifted their heads and looked toward the western corner of the south. Then a flight of birds streamed suddenly over a low hill, perhaps five miles away but appearing to be much nearer in the clear air.

"Men come!" said Tola. "Many men."

And a few minutes later a compact body of men — soldiers, it seemed, for the light flashed from spear points — rounded the corner of a ridge, followed soon after by a larger band that might be pursuing the others. They were all weary and well-nigh spent, judging from the way they marched, though those in front were close together, in column of threes, a man here and there supported by his rankers.

Those that followed were also straggling badly, and as they drew nearer, it was easy to see that they were savages, though at the head and at intervals along the column were men in long garments of striped red and white. The savages were black men wearing plumes of ostrich feathers and carrying shields. There were men in tunics, wearing caps, but those in the striped robes and pointed hats were the commanders.

Slowly pursued and pursuers drew nearer, and the watchers stepped down into the mouth of the pass, which led up on to the plateau, and, concealed by the rocks, stood waiting. Rai and Balin looked at each other, their faces paled with sudden excitement.

"It can't be Mago!" said Rai.

Rai turned and spoke to Tola, and the chief nodded his plumed head.

"It is good," he said. "We will help them. They are brave men."

He singled out two of his warriors and sent them back to the village; then he gave an order to the rest of his men that set them to dropping down the mountainside. Rai and Balin, with Gilla, Jair, and Belus, followed.

The river, coming from the defile, flowed between them and the plain, but as they reached the bank, they saw the fugitives begin to cross, while three men stood on a knoll crowned by a tree, with their weapons ready. The water ran swiftly, coming to the waists of the wading men, one or two of whom lost their footing and were swept away. Then Tola's men appeared, for they had before been hidden from the sight of the others, and these stopped in consternation and tried to get at their bows. But Rai and Balin stood in full sight on the bank and shouted. They shouted in Phoenician, the language of Carthage, for Rai was sure that they were Mago's men. Tola's warriors then went into the river and formed a line from bank

to bank, staying those who slipped and restoring them to safety, and the weary soldiers, hardly able to believe their senses, struggled on and came to shore.

One grizzled man, stumbling on with wide staring eyes, stood at salute as he reached the boys.

"Master Rai — Master Rai!" he stammered.

"Is it you, Malcho?" said Rai, and clasped the man's hand. He knew the man well as one of Hannibal's old soldiers who had always saluted him as a small boy, half in jest, and permitted him to watch while he put a squad through its paces, and even to stand by his side and shout the magic words that moved the men so swiftly.

Rai had time to see how haggard and worn the old soldier looked and how tattered his garments were before he checked the question that trembled on Malcho's bearded lips by one of his own.

"Where is my brother?" he asked.

"The captain stands yonder on the knoll, waiting as is his wont until all have crossed, but . . . "

Rai waited for no more. With a word to Balin he dashed into the water, followed by Tola and the rest of his men, holding his bow high above his head, and presently Balin saw Rai standing

by the side of the three beneath the tree on the little mound. Balin and Gilla, Jair and Belus were kept busy helping men to struggle out of the river and directing them to the height of the defile. Most of them, weary as they were, seemed to have taken on new life. Whether because of the sight of friends so strangely appearing or of a place where they could make a stand, they were able to scramble up the rocky hillside. Some needed a rest, though, which they took by lying flat upon the ground; while Tola and his warriors, Rai and Mago and the two lieutenants, faced the enemy.

These, as weary as the pursued, fell back in confusion at the unexpected vision of a new foe, till one of the leaders in the striped robes, springing forward, drew a long whip of rhinoceros hide from his belt and began to use it. Those on the knoll saw the cruel thong cutting red gashes in the bare backs of the savages, and Rai drew back his bow string only to realize that they were still beyond bowshot. But the wielder of the whip struck, perhaps by chance, one of the tall warriors with the plume of feathers and fell gasping with a spear through his throat. The surging

line of men coiled back upon itself like a wounded snake, and all along the ranks the leaders sprang to defense and to quell the sudden rebellion.

"Now is our chance!" said Mago, and they all crossed safely while the enemy were thus occupied.

There was still no time for mutual explanations, as they climbed the rocks and gained the defile. Here they made a stand where they had the advantage of the upward slope before them and the mountain at their back. Tola pointed to the sky. The sun had gone down behind the chain of hills to their right, yet the light still shone far across the plain.

"By the gods," said Mago, "they are making camp!"

It was so, for as they watched, the white-robed men reached the knoll, looked at the foaming torrent and the rocky slopes beyond, and apparently decided that nothing would be gained by attacking at once with their men in their present state. In half an hour fires had been set going, and a deep hum of contentment rose from the camp to the ears of those above.

Tola's men also made fires and cooked food,

and the wanderers were fed and rested, happy in the knowledge that they, who had for weeks fought their way through hostile country, had at last unaccountably come upon friends. At one fire sat Mago, Rai, and Balin, forgetting to eat as they talked, while Jair and Gilla and Belus, having eaten, wandered from fire to fire, and talked, too.

"We had no trouble," said Mago, "until we left the galleys in the great river, having brought them as far as we could. Since then there has been nothing but trouble, for since the long-ago days when Ophir belonged to Tyre, great changes have come upon the land. The rulers heard of our approach and sent to take us, and we were taken, losing men as a result, among them the good captain. We were led to a stone city with a fortress set upon a hill and put in the slave pits. And perhaps we should be there still, but one night there was a tremendous storm, and we were nearly drowned with the rain that ran from the stony ground into the pits. So they hauled us out, for they intended to have us work in the mines, and put us in a hut. After that there was a feast for the governor's name day or something of the sort, and we were

not taken back to the underground place. The guard became intoxicated, like the rest of the garrison, and we broke out, found weapons, and got away. There were men in the slave pits from different parts of the country, and one of them knew Monofutana; so we persuaded him to guide us there. And then we came north in search of the Red and the White Mountains, which we have not yet found. Of course we were pursued, but we managed to discourage the first band and were well away before they sent others after us. The men were splendid. Now tell me how you came to be here. When you came to me on the knoll, I thought I had lost my senses and was in a fever."

Rai told his story, and then they wrapped themselves in their cloaks and slept.

In the meantime Tola's messenger had reached the head village, and from there word of the enemy at the pass had gone out to the dozen or more petty chiefs who were under Tola's rule. In a hundred small villages, the word was received — in the fishing huts on the edge of the swamps; in the north where the tall ant heaps, hollowed out, served as grain bins; in the hills where the young men, lounging round the fires

over their evening meal, waited only to snatch up their ever-ready weapons, to sling their shields around their necks, and set the war plumes on their heads, while the women thrust into their skin pouches the unground corn that would serve as the "iron ration." As the sun set, the whole of Tola's country was streaked by lines of men trotting on each other's heels to the meeting place. And from the chief village Chabrias and Bochar sped out at the head of the portion of the army which was Tola's own, while only the fear of delaying them prevented Elissa and Ronwen from joining them.

It was still some hours to dawn when the first of the men swung eagerly into the defile and Chabrias and Bochar greeted Rai and heard the news of the meeting with Mago, which Chabrias admitted he had never really expected since he had seen the wide extent of the country.

Sentries had been posted by the ford to stop any would-be spies, but at three o'clock when Rai and Balin went down with the second relief, they found one of the guard lying dead behind a rock.

"I wonder that they have not rushed the pass," whispered Rai.

"They would know we were still here and would rather attack by daylight, I suppose," said Balin.

"Yes, but if the spies got up the slope, they know we have had reinforcements . . . "

"Still more reason to attack later, for they themselves probably have more men coming on."

"No need to wake Mago, do you think?"

"Would he attack them or order a retreat?"

"Retreat! We could not retreat," said Rai. "We could not go on and leave the pass open to them. Why, Tola's country . . . "

"All right! I was only asking! If Mago would not do either of those things, he would do nothing. So why wake him?"

They did not wake him, and all night Tola's men came running in, until at dawn a considerable force was gathered in the defile, up and down the slope, and along the river bank.

A thick white mist hung over the plain, a curious sight from above, with the newly-risen sun shining upon it, and sounds came muffled from beneath this gray blanket. Mago, holding a con-

ference over the morning meal, said gravely that he was afraid they were in for a battle.

Tola, coming up from below, stopped to speak as he passed, and his eyes gleamed. "A great fight comes!" he said. Rai and Balin looked at each other and smiled.

Mago turned to them as he rose, straightened his harness with a jerk, and bound on his belt. "There's nothing to look so pleased about, you grinning young gorillas," he said pleasantly. "If you were as sick of fighting as I am, you would rush through the pass and never stop running till you reached Carthage."

"We've done some fighting, too, haven't we, Balin?" said Rai carelessly, rubbing at an imaginary speck on his long knife. "Just a bit."

"Remember the Numidians?" asked Balin.

"And those fellows with the hats whom they called the Men-of-the-Mountain?" added Rai.

Mago looked at them again. "There's more which you have not told me then?" he asked. "Well, I suppose you couldn't have come all this way without some fighting. I beg your pardon. It's good to know that I have you to back me up with experience."

They saw that Mago spoke earnestly and was not poking fun at them, and smote each other on the back, fell into a clutch, and sprang apart again, remembering their dignity as leaders and the watchful eyes of Tola's men.

"Tola is a good man, too," said Balin with a grin.

The mist curled up in wisps and waves, and they saw that the plain beyond the river was black with men. The expected battle was at hand.

Mago left Tola, who was a natural-born commander, to fight in his own way, and half of Tola's men occupied the lower ground by the river, while Mago's soldiers, much rested, with the small band under Rai, commanded the path to the defile.

All that long hot day they fought, fighting in the river among the rocks until the water ran red in streaks and along the slope where the bushes, trampled under striving feet, gave off a pungent odor which was not stronger than the smell of blood. Once the enemy broke through and rushed the slope, and then Gilla and Chabrias, fighting back to back, saved the day; once Tola's men on the right turned to flee, and Rai

and Balin, by Tola's side, calmed them and turned them back. All had their share in the honors as in the labor of the day, and when the shadows of the mountain began to stretch across the plain, the enemy was in full retreat.

There were many dead on both sides. Most of the living had wounds, in the main trifling ones, except that of Mago, who had a severe wound in the upper arm from a battle-axe that had just missed his head and would have killed him had it not been fended off by Gilla's great club. He also had a wound in his side where the leather harness had laid it bare.

They carried him in a litter back to Tola's head village, and he lay unconscious some days, for the wound had come as the climax to a great and long-continued strain. Probably only Elissa's devoted nursing caused him to recover. But the long enforced rest that followed for all of them before he was able to walk, did them all good, and Tola's people tried to make them comfortable and happy.

"Do you remember," asked Chabrias one day, "when we left Carthage?"

"Were we ever in Carthage?" countered Rai

with a laugh. "Yes, I remember that the first figs were ripe and the quail were still calling."

"Then in Carthage now the quail are calling again," said Chabrias.

"You don't mean that we have been a whole year on the journey — though it seems truly like a lifetime?"

"I have marked the new moons as they came, and that moon we saw last night was the thirteenth."

"You were perfect Jasons ever to have reached here at all," said Mago.

"What about you?" they answered in chorus.

Mago was nearly well, and one afternoon they all walked out for exercise. After resting awhile on a rock by the side of a little tumbling stream, they were ready to return home before the sun set and the swift twilight came. Suddenly Ronwen clutched Rai's arm.

"Look!" she cried.

Their eyes followed her pointing finger to the west, and high above the hills, as if a veil there had been drawn away, rose two mountain peaks, in the range that they had been seeing every day, the one peak a glittering white, the other a flam-

ing red. Then with equal unexpectedness both were again hidden.

"The Red and the White Mountains — the gates to the land of Dido's treasure!" exclaimed Mago.

CHAPTER XVII

TREACHERY

WHEN they reproached Tola for having deceived them, for he had denied any knowledge of Lulala, he replied, unabashed, that he had done it for their own good.

"The people of Lulala kill all strangers," he said. "But it has just occurred to me that it is said that they await some visitors from afar. Perhaps it is you whom they await!" His eyes widened with the surprise of the idea. "Truly, I have never seen people like you, for you have eyes like the sky and you have eyes like the water at eve-

ning, and those people have eyes like the young giraffe."

"What if it should be," said Rai, "that they wait for the old Phoenicians, Queen Dido's men, to return?"

Except for their bearing, they did not look like the envoys of a queen, for their linen garments had long ago been left in tatters on the thorns, and their remaining clothes they wore under their cloaks of skin. Elissa had managed to keep one gown and one purple veil, spangled with gold, and attired in this and wearing the gold disc around her neck, it was hoped that she would impress the people of Lulala deeply enough to make them open their gates.

Tola went with them to the foot of the rocky slope above the tree line, where a gorge opened between the mountains, the one peak white with crystal, the other, some hundred feet lower, showing a sort of rock formation that in certain lights looked red like rust. Tola then retired, shaking his head and very troubled. The travellers continued along the gloomy ways of the gorge until they were stopped by a thundering waterfall that filled the end of the gorge. Tola had said that

this was the entrance of Lulala, but they could see no opening until Balin went step by step to the edge of the water, dashed by spray and deafened by noise, and turning made motions for them to follow. They did so reluctantly, for it seemed useless, and then they found that against the end wall, in the very shadow of the water, there was an opening in the rock which made a passage. This they entered in single file, and after threading the dark tunnel for some minutes, they came out upon a flat rock, hidden from below by a high natural parapet.

There was no other opening or cave, and the ledge went no farther, so that they thought Tola must be wrong.

As they were debating, a voice spoke above them in the language that Tola used, "What do you here?" Then as the watcher above caught sight of the travellers' faces, he gave a yelp of excitement and spoke in Phoenician, "Who are ye?"

"We come from the north, with the seal of Dido the Queen," answered Mago, lifting the gold disc so that it could be seen.

A head came out from a crack above them and

the eyes scanned them curiously. Then it withdrew, and there was silence for a few minutes. A creaking noise then occurred that sounded like the opening of gates, and the rock in front of them seemed to split in two, as part of it was drawn inwards, leaving an open space. A tall man appeared in the opening who, after looking from one to another of the strangers, flung a word behind him and bowed deeply.

"Enter, O messengers of the queen," he said. "Leave your men without."

Mago and Rai thought of the girls and looked at each other questioningly. "Can we not leave the girls outside with Malcho?" asked Rai quickly. But Elissa walked through the gap, and they followed, after Mago had given orders to Malcho to leave a guard on the platform and himself retire with the rest to the gorge.

As they filed on through the gateway inside, a great gong sounded. They came out of the entrance to the tunnel on to a hillside overlooking a valley of great beauty, with a lake in the center bordered with palms, a small white temple on one side, an enormous temple sheathed in copper on the other, and other buildings set round it

among trees. Beyond lay cultivated lands, with more groups of dwellings, a grassy plain with a river winding through it to the lake, and in the distance there rose mountain peaks.

A procession came to meet them. They found afterwards that for hundreds of years the watch had been kept by day and night to give warning of the coming of "Queen Dido's Messengers", and at the first sound of the gong the people had come forth to celebrate.

The Governor of Lulala and his soldiers came first; then priests, some in white garments and some in black; then the people.

The new arrivals were lodged in an unoccupied palace, and slaves were sent in to wait on them, bearing stores of all kinds. They were to be given until the next day to rest and refresh themselves; then they were to be heard by the "Suffete" and the Council; then there would be a banquet.

Rai and Balin looked at each other and grimaced.

"Can't we clear out?" whispered Rai, who, now that Mago had taken over the leadership of the party, was his old light-hearted self. But of

course they could not go — it would have been neither polite nor politic — and they had to make up their minds to endure what was to come in the way of speeches and feastings.

Mago had two important visitors, the first a tall hawk-faced man with a cruel look, dressed in black with the emblems of Baal-Moloch embroidered on his tunic in gold and red. He was very like Baal-Azur but seemed to have energy. With much pomp he was announced as "Cadmus, Priest of Baal and High Priest of the Valley of Gold."

Though his Phoenician tongue was rather old in style, it was like enough to their own to cause them no great difficulty. They found afterwards that the populace of Lulala spoke a language that was a mixture of Phoenician and the speech of Tola's country; so they were always able to understand and to speak to any one of them.

Cadmus told them that the Tyrians, fleeing from a great sickness that had fallen on Ophir, had taken refuge with the men of the Hebrew king, Solomon, in the land north of Monofutana. For a time they had lived there in peace, until fierce little yellow men had come from the west

and fought them with poisoned arrows. The remnant of the Tyrians and King Solomon's people had found a safe harbor in the hidden valley of Lulala. The Tyrians were in the majority, and they had sent messages to Tyre — where a woman sat upon the throne of King Hiram — going by the great river of the north, through Egypt. The queen had sent men for gold, giving the people in return craftsmen who had taught the hidden people many things. For some years messengers had gone back and forth between Tyre and Lulala, but at length the queen had sent her seal to say that they must come no more to Tyre but to wait for the messengers she would send. These had never come, and the refugees had forgotten the old way home.

"And now you have come," said the priest, "and will aid me to overcome the white priests and purge the valley of their hated presence."

Mago looked at him and disliked him.

"You are the servants of the lady Elissa, I understand," continued Cadmus. "It has been decided that she shall be wedded to the Governor, at the next full moon, when we hope to make an acceptable smoke to Moloch with the bodies of

Eli and his priests." He showed his white teeth in a smile.

There was a stir at the door, and an old man with a long white beard entered hastily. Over his white robe, beautifully worked with gold bells and blue and purple and scarlet pomegranates, was hung a breastplate of jewels.

"My lord," he said to Mago, courteously in spite of his agitation, "I am Eli, chief of the white priests of Jehovah. I appeal to you as a stranger and the messenger of the Queen, against this man. For hundreds of years we that are the remnant of the people of King Solomon, the son of David, in this land, have lived in amity with the men of Tyre in this valley of Lulala. Many there are of my people who have gone over to the worship of Baal, and there are Phoenicians who have become worshippers of Jehovah, so that we can scarcely now call ourselves Hebrew; but this Cadmus would destroy us utterly so that he and his priests may reign alone in this valley. Would it be the will of the queen that this should be?"

"Most certainly it is not the will of the Lady Elissa," said Mago, who had risen, "and almost certainly it is not the will of the Lady Elissa that

she should become the wife of the Governor. We are strangers here and should affiliate ourselves with no party, but we will stand against oppression by whomsoever it is practiced."

Cadmus smiled arrogantly. "The Governor will take his answer from the Lady Elissa when the word has been given to her. To-morrow night there will be a feast in the palace here; perhaps, when you have considered the matter, you will have another answer to give!"

He bowed and swept out with his train.

"The Governor is the son of Cadmus," said Eli; and he remained and sat talking with Mago for an hour, telling him many stories of the reign of terror that had held the valley in its sway since Cadmus had become High Priest of the black priests of Baal.

"It is the same story here, then, as in Carthage," said Mago. "The priests of Baal will have no rival to their power and rule by terror. I do not trust Cadmus a hair's breadth, and wish we had not brought the girls into this place."

"The people are not bad at heart," said old Eli, as he rose to go, "but they are afraid of Cadmus and his son, and there is a fearful fascination to

them in the sacrifices. Always, before, the ceremonies of Baal-Moloch have been kept within bounds — once a year a victim suffered on the brazen altar — but now Cadmus holds a Baal-fire every full of the moon, and I fear the people will become hardened by the practice. Our once happy valley is a place of blood and terror."

Chabrias went up to the roof when old Eli had taken his departure and he was interested to find Bochar there, for he had seen the Carthaginian slip out after Cadmus. Bochar was walking distractedly up and down and turned a pale face to Chabrias which, combined with his ruffled hair, gave him an oddly troubled appearance. Chabrias walked to the parapet and looked down at the lights in the valley, and presently Bochar stopped beside him.

"Well, here we are in the Place-of-Gold," he said gloomily, "the place of accursed gold!" He grasped the Greek's arm. "You must make them go from here!" he cried. "It is death for them to stay."

"And death to return to Carthage," answered Chabrias quietly. "Death lies to the south, and should we follow the way of Dido's map and gain

Egypt and find Hannibal in Syria, there is equal dearth of safety! But you must explain further, Bochar, having begun."

"I can only tell you to beware, Chabrias. If I only knew what to do! I must break an oath sworn upon the altar, an oath that bought my life moreover, or do that from which my soul shrinks!" He turned an appealing look to Chabrias, who met it with steady kindly eyes. "Whichever way I turn, I seem to see dishonour."

"Your eyes are clearer than they were when we left the desert, friend."

"Never before had I known virtue! Tell me, for I will take your word on it, Chabrias. Shall I break the oath by which I bought my life — or betray." He stopped with a gasp.

"I am neither a god nor a priest to tell you what you must or must not do, Bochar. Let your own heart speak, remembering this — that nothing can make an evil act justifiable."

"Have you ever, perhaps, thought that I was not what I appeared to be — but a spy of Baal-Azur?"

"For a long time," said Chabrias gravely, "I have known that there was something wrong —

ever since, I think, you were so enraged with Balin for saving your life from the hippo and the crocodile . . . "

Bochar's eyes widened in surprise. "It is true!" he said. "I hated to be beholden to any of you — as things were."

"And seeing that gave me the hope that the good in you would overcome the not-so-good," said Chabrias.

"Well," Bochar drew a deep breath, "this place is as disturbed as I am to-night. See how the people crowd and move from one spot to another. Those priests in the black robes are everywhere. It is like an ant heap when the earth pig beats the ground before it with his tail."

The next day from the roof they saw dark lines of people coming in from all over the plain. Mago had to spend the day receiving visitors, but the two boys went out and roamed about the valley, seeing everything and followed by curious stares.

"I don't like this," said Rai. "Do you see those fellows there, how they scowl?"

"Yet there are more that seemed pleased to welcome us."

Just then the dark men swinging past, looked

them up and down. "Messengers of the queen!" sneered one. "Pretty messengers, so long in coming that their clothes are in rags!"

This was taken up by other passers, and a dispute began. The two boys strolled on, as they felt that under the circumstances they must not get into a brawl or even run the risk of causing one, much as they were both inclined to resent the insult.

All that they saw and heard during that day made them more and more uneasy, and as they prepared for the banquet, Rai said to Balin that as soon as he was able to slip away, he would do so and try to get out of the valley to bring in Tola's men and the rest of Mago's soldiers.

"Right," said Balin, and they proceeded to take a few simple precautions. Rai felt it was his duty to do something, as Mago was helpless in the midst of the crowd of notabilities that surrounded him.

The banquet took place in the large hall of the guest palace, that had not been used for years. It was a wonderful meal, served on small tables, with ivory couches for the guests. Wreaths of flowers were twined everywhere, and music

played behind curtains. The only light, however, was supplied by torches held up by rows of slaves.

The banquet was well on its way when Cadmus, rising, lifted his goblet and looked toward the Governor, who faced him at the end of the long table.

"Friends, let us drink to our Suffete. He weds the Lady Elissa, the messenger of the queen, at the Feast of the Full Moon, one day from now."

Mago sprang to his feet. "You lie!" he cried. "The Lady Elissa has not given her consent, nor ever will." His words, perhaps, were not wise, but probably they did not affect the course of events.

"It matters not," returned Cadmus. "When the choice is given her between death in the altar fires, blessed though that be, and marriage . . . " he shrugged his shoulders. "My friend here," he said, turning to Bochar, "will see to it that she has no weapons . . . "

"No! No!" shrieked Bochar, starting up. "No friend of yours! My oath must go — Mago, you are betrayed!"

There was a roar of contending voices, a flash

of weapons, till then concealed under the black robes of the priests of Baal, and each fell upon a neighboring white priest. The strangers were seized and bound and hurried away into the night that with a mysterious suddenness had become as bright as day with fires and as noisy with shrieks.

Rai and Balin had managed to get away, they hoped unseen, before the hideous proceedings had begun, and they went first to see if the girls were all right, as they were not at the banquet. Then they marched boldly to the side door of the place, found the doorkeepers away from their post, as they had hoped, and walked out, talking together as if they had not a care in the world.

Once out of sight they hastened toward the gate in the rock, but before they had gone farther than the end of the lake, there was the sound of the great gong, and at the same time a noise of shouting and the pounding of running feet.

"Are they after us already?" said Rai, drawing his sword, which he had buckled to his waist before coming out. The whole valley seemed to be roused; there were lights everywhere, and they heard the clash of arms.

"It is something more important than we that

troubles them!" said Balin. "They are fighting everywhere." They turned to get back to the palace, but the way was blocked by men, crowds of men, while the glare of the torches showed them to be the black-robed priests.

Skirting this array, the two tried to move on, but came upon two of the white priests battling furiously against five of the black priests in the only path. One fell dead as they came up, and the assailants sprang forward to end the other's life as Rai and Balin came up with a shout. The second priest was wounded, though, and slipped to the ground, leaving the two boys to face the five black priests. The white priest flung his knife from the ground and pierced the fifth man in the throat, but still Rai and Balin were left with two each to tackle. They were hard beset, but fighting back to back they had downed one, when a hoarse voice cried, "Are you there, Chief?" and Gilla bounded into the fray. It was soon over, then.

"You and Gilla go to the gate," said Rai to Balin, "and I will get back to the palace."

"You will never win to it by this road," gasped the wounded white priest. "Take me to the white temple, and maybe I can help you to a way."

CHAPTER XVIII

RAI'S ADVENTURES

AS Rai and the white priest struggled toward the white temple, they had more than once to slip behind a tree or the angle of a wall to let a yelling crowd of men rush by.

"This has been simmering for years," said the priest bitterly, " but the men of Baal have taken us by surprise at last after all!" He said no more, having to save his strength, and Rai had all he could do to get him to the temple, for he was badly wounded. The gates were shut, but the guards quickly opened them as soon as they

learned who was knocking. Within all was quiet, as most of the priests were in the streets. The place was very strong, and Rai fervently wished he could bring his party to this shelter. He refused to stay, as the priest tried to persuade him, and asked only to be shown how to reach the palace where his friends were. One of the men suggested that he should take a boat that usually lay at the side steps by the lake, but it was found to be gone. However, Rai, when he found that he could reach the palace by the water, said he would swim, and slipped in without more words. He set off with a strong swift stroke that carried him swiftly through the water. All the disturbance seemed to be at the far end of the lake, where most of the houses were. There the water reflected the flare of torches in long rippling streaks, but where Rai swam, there lay only the faint light of the moon in its first quarter. Suddenly he felt a swirl of the water behind him and turned cold, thinking it might be a crocodile; then he thought of pythons, as something touched him. When two wet hands seized him round the waist, the relief was so great to find his assailant only a man that it seemed to lend him added strength. He kicked

out vigorously, inhaled deeply, and squirmed out of the hold, grasped the other by the arms, and taking a deep breath, dived down, dragging the man with him. It was a fearful thing, fighting under water like that, but not for nothing had Rai spent hours in the sea by far-off Carthage, and presently he rose, bringing the unconscious form of the enemy with him. A boat was rowing toward him, however; so he dived and swam under water as long as he could, turning back toward the shore he had left, and came up in the shadow of a building. The rowers, puzzled, gave up the chase, and Rai began once more to swim across the lake.

He landed and, wringing the water from his tunic, hastened toward the guest palace as fast as he could in the darkness and strangeness. He had quite lost his way, but he walked quickly on nevertheless, having to turn away often because a wall stretched across the path or because he found himself in a garden filled with prickly palm trees. He knew that he had to get to the head of the lake, on the same side as stood the white temple, but as he had been headed off from swimming that way, he had had to land on the wrong side. All the

buildings along his side were in darkness except the temple of Baal-Moloch, and that was ablaze with lights. He could see as he neared it, from the shelter of the trees, the black priests hurrying up and down the wide stairs on the landward side, with drawn swords and spears and torches, and exultant shouts. He slipped by unseen and then, turning a corner, came upon three of the black priests fighting with a soldier. On the ground was the body of another man.

"This is getting monotonous!" said Rai to himself, but he slid along the wall, took the sword from the dead hand, for he had lost his own sword when he dove into the lake, and went to the soldier's help. The man, fighting for his life, took new strength when he realized aid was at hand. He made short work of one of the enemy, Rai disposed of the other, and the third took to his heels. The soldier leaned panting on his sword and thanked Rai for his timely help.

"Now, show me the way to the place where the new guests are held," said Rai.

"The black priests hold the palace, and the guests — the Messengers of the Queen — are in their hands!" replied the soldier. "You could

never pass them, but come to my house yonder and I will hide you, for if I mistake not, you are one of them and the priests are seeking you."

The man was urgent, but Rai was not satisfied to abandon his attempt to reach the palace. He determined, however, to return first to the gate, to see if Balin had succeeded in getting out, and if not to help him. As he hurried along, he came suddenly into the glare of torches, and a group of running men passed. One made a grab at his arm, but he shook himself loose and began to run, swiftly, around corners, in and out of gardens, taking the way he had trodden before, so that he had some knowledge of what to avoid, and soon he felt that he had put his pursuers off, until he heard another yell and, turning his head, saw that he was being tracked by two cheetahs, held in leash. His heart sank, but he increased his speed. Then the men slipped the leash, and the lithe beasts on their long legs flew toward him at their full speed.

Rai looked about him as he ran; there were trees, but it was no use to climb as he would soon be surrounded. The only thing he could do was to take to the lake again. Never had he run as he

ran now. Then he saw the gleam of the water, sprang on to a low wall that bordered the great garden he was in, and dived from it straight into the lake.

He could not remember whether or not cheetahs could swim and half expected to feel them at his heels, as they had been a moment before on the land. The black priests, coming up, gave a long shout, and the waiting guard boat turned and seemed to leap through the water toward Rai. Another boat appeared, and he was hemmed in. In vain he swam under water; they saw him no matter where he rose; and he was driven nearer and nearer to the shore he had just left.

Rai, however, was still cool and collected; his eyes scanned the shore as his brain was planning for escape; and presently he thought he saw a chance. The black temple of Baal-Moloch stood in front of him now, its steps built out into the lake. These, too, were still ablaze with lights, but at the side, in darkness the deeper for the glare beyond, Rai thought he could land unseen. He swam under water for a short space and came up, to see to his dismay, that a wall bordered the

lake in that place, a high wall without an opening. Now he was indeed in a trap, for the boats had come up, and unless he could swim between them unseen, there was no way out. He trod water as he drew in breath for the attempt, and then he saw that half below and half above the surface of the water, there was an archway in the wall. Like a waterbird he dived, and the next moment he was through the arch and in a dark passage, with a roof not more than a foot above his head and about him scarcely room enough in which to swim.

His great fear now was that there might be a grating across the way, but there was not, and after a time he came out into an open space. It was still pitch dark, and he came up against a wall with a jolt. He felt upwards and his fingers slid over the edge of the stone, and he pulled himself up. There was just room enough for him on this ledge, and he took a much needed rest. As he leaned against the stone, he heard the sound of voices, and after a moment realised that the sound must be carried by the wall, as when he leaned forward he did not hear it. However, it meant that the wall, and perhaps the ledge, went

on, and he stood up and made his cautious way along the narrow space.

He had not gone far when his heart gave a thump, and he shuddered. There was an overpowering smell of musk. Too well he knew what it meant — crocodiles! Well, if he went back, it meant the danger of the boat; if he kept on, perhaps there would be a chance that the ledge might be above the reach of the creatures, or at least still be narrow. There was a slithering sound in front of him, and something slipped into the water; so he knew that hope was vain.

A light suddenly appeared and disappeared at some distance ahead, as though a torch was carried past an opening, but in the second of its passing, he saw that the ledge in front of him had widened, and on it were rows of long dark forms. At the same time, he saw the opening at the end.

There was only one thing to be done. With a silent prayer to his unknown god, Rai tightened his belt and with a bound was off. Almost before his light feet had disturbed the sleeping creatures, he was among them, through, over, past them, and running on for the opening.

He sprang through it and sank down with a gasp, for it had been an ordeal to try the strongest nerves. His feet had been within an inch of a cruel jaw, had grazed a powerful tail more than once, and the last one of the row had swept its tail at him.

He put his hands out before him in the dark to see if the opening led through, and touched a grating. There were two steps, another narrow ledge, and then the bars! Rai put his head down upon his hands; even his brave spirit was moved to despair, and he gave a groan. Then a voice spoke, calling to him from the dark.

CHAPTER XIX

AT THE GATE

MEANTIME Balin and Gilla, after leaving Rai, disappeared into the darkness and presently were climbing the hill toward the gate in the rock. Silent as shadows they stole from rock to rock, from bush to bush, and reached the opening without any trouble. They knew that there was a cave, with the windlass for moving the rock gate in the midst of it, and of course there would be guards. Balin took his knife from his belt, and Gilla lifted his iron-spiked club.

A narrow passage led at right angles from an

empty outer cave into the inner cave, from which opened the gate. Gilla wrinkled up his nose as they came to the opening.

"Nasty smells," he said, sniffing. "Wild beasts, I think."

They looked out again down the hillside and all around, then stole to the passage, and keeping well to the side, looked within. Two men were asleep on the ground, four were seated with their backs to the passage, playing a gambling game with stones; one, armed with spear and dirk, stood on guard before the gate. They were talking in low voices and were not alert for danger from within the valley, which was to the boys' advantage.

There were steps hewn in the rock, leading to a square hole over the boulder that was the gate, scarcely large enough for any one to squeeze through, and both Balin and Gilla would have stuck hopelessly, did they try it. On the farther side of the cave was an iron door, heavily barred into the rocky wall, and overhead on either side of the passage opening was a crack, as if a layer of the rock, softer than the rest, had crumbled away, leaving a shelf that reached in one or two

places to the roof, and in others was only a foot high.

The two looked at each other. Could they, with the advantage of a surprise, successfully attack the seven? Whether or no, they had to make the attempt, and in another moment they would have bounded out, probably to their death, when the loud sound of voices and the light of a torch flickering on the wall, made them pause. In the seconds before the guards heard and turned, the two took the only way within they could, and almost as though they had flown there, were on the crack above them. Gilla's club gave him some trouble, and nearly betrayed him, but the noise it made was lost in the sounds of the approaching men.

Balin was squeezed very uncomfortably in his niche, though he lay as flat as he could, but Gilla had much more room, being also in the darker corner.

Half a dozen black-robes came in, hurrying, flushed with fighting and slaughter. The soldiers started to their feet, with hands on weapons, but the foremost priest spoke peaceably.

"Will you join us," he said, "as most of your comrades have? We have taken the valley, and the plain will soon be ours. There will be loot — and freedom — for the glum-faced Eli, high priest of the white priests, will be dead."

"What of the others?" asked one soldier, grimly.

"Which?"

"Those who did not join you?"

The priest shrugged his shoulders. "The fortune of war, my lad," he answered.

"We are seven, and you are six," said the soldier. "Suppose we do not join in this precious affair of yours?"

"But those two of your number are drunk," replied the other, "and besides, we are not the only people in this. Come, lay down your arms, and join us in a cup. I see you have wine jars there."

Grumbling and reluctant the soldiers subsided. One lifted up a jar, and began to pour wine into a horn cup the priest held out. He filled that, and went to another, and then Gilla was involved in the affair.

He said afterwards in private to Balin that he

did not know what made him do it, but from the others he took the credit they gave him of a brilliant idea. He had examined the shelf at his side and found under a layer of dust a quantity of rubbish that had from time to time been put there out of the way; among the things was a belt without a clasp, a broken jar, and a thin dagger, the kind that was used to cut up meat at meal times. Gilla took a piece of the broken pottery, a rather heavy piece, and threw it with careful aim at the wine jar the soldier was holding. It struck with force enough to shatter the jar, but the noise of it was drowned by the noise of the men, who were all talking at once. The wine spurted out, the soldier lost his hold of the heavy jar, and it fell on the priest's sandaled foot. He lifted the injured limb with a howl of pain, and the soldier turned on another of the priests.

"What made you do that?" he asked fiercely.

"Do what?" shouted the other. "I did nothing!"

"You struck the jar out of my hand!" said the soldier, and in a minute they were facing each other, ripe for a fight.

Gilla nearly choked with laughter. Then the real worth of the incident to them struck him. If

he could make them fight each other, then he and Balin might have a chance of doing what they had come to do. He picked up the dagger and looked at Balin who, as far as he could see in the dim light, was making faces at him. What did the Chief want him to do? He gave it up, and turning back to the disputing men, he threw back his hand and flicked the dagger into their midst. He had not aimed it, save to make it land in their midst, but the priest, who seemed to be the leader, moved at that moment, and it caught him in the throat. No more fuel was needed for the fire, and they all fell to fighting, not one being cool enough to notice that the dagger had struck downward, having been thrown from above; but perhaps if any one had noticed this, he would have said it was due to the fact that one of the soldiers was a tall man, taller than any of the priests.

The fight ranged all over the cave. The sleeping men were kicked in the scuffle and awakened, but they were unable to stand straight and could not help their comrades. One crawled to a water jar and poured water on his head, soaking his friend also, and in the end it was these two who were left the only able-bodied members of the whole com-

pany. Several of both sides were dead, the others were badly wounded, and the two half-sober men laid them out and took counsel together.

"Best go for help," said one.

"What shall we do about the gate?" asked the other.

Then Balin and Gilla swung themselves down from the shelf and confronted the two. "We are here to open the gate," said Balin. "Will you help us, or must we bind you?"

"Two men cannot open that — who are you not to know that?" said one with owlish gravity.

"Very true," replied Balin. "Then you will help us?"

"I did not say that — but shall we, Agar?"

"If you say so," said Agar.

They went to the windlass and began to walk round, but the creaking thing had not made more than two or three turns and the rope had just become taut, when a voice behind them spoke loudly, "What is this?"

They turned to see one of the priests they had thought to be dead sitting up. He had only been stunned evidently and was quite sound, though dazed for the moment.

"Ah," he said, "I see! No, I surrender!"

"Then come here and help us turn this thing."

He rose slowly to his feet and began to stagger toward them, but as he came opposite the passage, with a bound he was through it, before they could move. Gilla followed, but as he entered the opening there was the clang of iron, and one of the soldiers called out, "Baal! He has shut us in!"

"Well, what of it?" asked Balin, rather impatiently for him. "Only work with us and we will have this open and our friends here, before he can bring his."

"You do not know!" screamed the man, and began to claw his way up the wall, followed by his companion. "You had better do as we do," said this one, who was calmer.

Balin waited to see the necessity, and Gilla did as his chief did. Then they saw that the iron door had slid back, leaving the bolts still in the rock, and behind the iron door was a dark space.

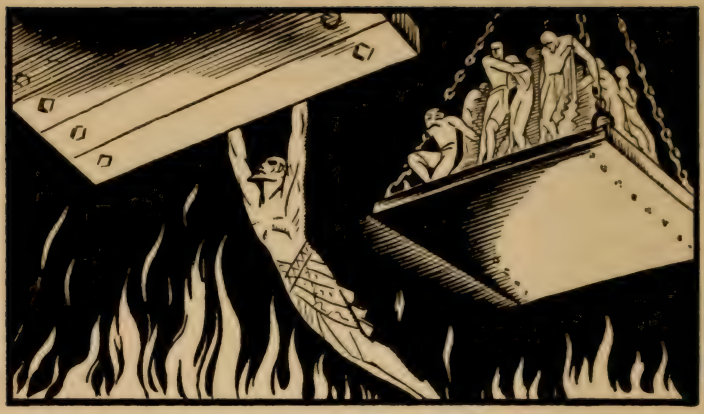
"Chief! The odor!" said Gilla, and Balin needed no telling.

They, too, took no time in getting on the ledge, and had hardly risen from the floor when a great

shaggy head came out of the dark, followed by two more.

"Lions!" said Balin, with a look at Gilla, who wagged his head.

"I told the Chief there were wild beasts about," was all that Gilla said.



CHAPTER XX

GOLD!

THE captives had spent a miserable night and a most uncomfortable day, wracked with fears for the girls and torn with anger, too, at the manner of their betrayal.

"The only spark of hope," said Bochar, who had been loaded with heavier chains and treated with more ignominy than the rest, "the one spark of hope is that those two lads and the tame savage are at liberty."

"We hope they are," said Mago, "but what can they do against this foul crowd?"

"Young Rai is able to do the impossible," retorted Bochar, "and that Balin will back him up to the last drop of blood and last moment."

He knew what made Mago so despondent — the thought of Elissa — and he tried to give him hope.

With the morning light they were taken out and led in chains round to the temple of Baal, led by the longest way apparently so that they could be seen by all the people. By far the greater number stood in sullen silence, but there were others who yelled and spat at them. They walked on with heads high, apparently taking no notice of the mob.

At last the temple was reached and the captives were taken inside and led up stairs and along passages until they came out of a doorway on to a narrow wooden bridge without a rail, high up on the side of the great building. The other end of the bridge was fixed to a brazen platform, and it was not too comfortable a proceeding to walk along so narrow a path at such a height. But it had to be done. At least the chains had been removed and they could balance themselves. Mago for one would have tried to use his hands on the

men guarding him had he not seen Elissa and the three girls standing clinging to each other on the platform.

"He walks across the bridge as though it were as wide as the plain," thought Bochar with a grimace, as he sidled along after him, followed by the rest — Chabrias, Jair, Belus, and the old High Priest, Eli.

When they were all on the platform, there was little room to spare, and they felt giddy.

"Look! Look!" gasped Belus, pointing upward. "It is a scale!"

They looked up and saw that the chains that were fastened to the edge of the platform, one on each side, were held together high above, in a great hook that in its turn was fast to a beam; and across the temple, there hung another platform, like the one they were on but empty, and like it, held to a bridge. But this bridge was much wider and had a railing along its side.

The floor of the scale was warm to their feet, and all at once the awful truth burst upon them that below them were the fires of Moloch. If the other scale when it was filled, did not out-

weigh them, *they* would go down into the flames. Bochar lay down and looked searchingly over the edge.

"What do you see?" whispered Chabrias, who knelt beside him.

"Yes, it is indeed the fires!" answered Bochar. "They blaze just below us; and we shall go down well, if we be not cooked before then as we stand here!" He tried to jest.

"Get up, man," said Chabrias. "The more you see, the less you will like! Hear the people, how they murmur!"

"But all here are those who want us to die!"

"They will have a noble spectacle. But what is to go in the other scale? I am curious to know that."

"And when you know, you *will* die!" Bochar grinned.

There was a sound that swelled into a shout from all around, as the temple slaves began to carry burdens across the bridge to fill the other scale.

"Gold! It is gold!" gasped Jair.

The chief priest of the temple of Baal-Moloch stood up on the pulpitlike place opposite them,

in front of the great image of Moloch from whose hand the scale hung.

"You came for gold, O strangers," he shouted, "and gold you shall have. When we have tried that in the balance, it is yours! Year by year in the days when the miners still worked — for they wearied of gold that none came to fetch and that could buy naught — year by year in those days a part of all they found was set aside for the Rulers of Tyre. This share shall be put into the scale and, mark me, if it outweighs you, it shall be yours, and you shall be free to take it and go whither you came. I do not need to say what will befall if it is lighter than you are. The weight of those who are not here shall be taken from the heap, and the weight of Eli, who stands there with you, will be added. Give thanks to me for my justice. Bring the gold!"

The slaves came with bags of gold dust, which they slit open that all might see it was really gold and emptied into the scale, and came also with bars which they stacked in piles in the scale. Then, even in their present plight, the victims stared in amazement as a slave came with a bag from which he shook a heap of glitter-points upon the gold.

"Diamonds!" whispered Bochar.

The wooden bridges were drawn back together, and for a sickening moment the scales swung through the air. Then they steadied, and the one on which the Carthaginians stood began to sink. Down, down they went till they could hear the rushing of the flames and feel the heat. Elissa and Mago were standing hand in hand; and Argia had hid her eyes upon the shoulder of Belus; Chabrias was steadying Ronwen and Ceara who had their arms around each other; and old Eli was praying aloud to his God. Bochar leaned over and spoke to Jair, who had sunk to his knees. Then — then — Bochar sprang across the space between the scales and caught the edge of the other scale as it swung toward them. At once that scale of gold went down and the other rose. There was a sudden utter stillness as the people saw what he had done. Then they rose in their seats and shouted and cried loudly. Bochar turned his face toward his friends, raised one hand as if in farewell, and smiled. Then he let go his hold and dropped down into the flames, which seemed to rise and meet him.

There was a great shout and then another still-

ness, broken by a roar of rage from above. The grief-stricken group looked up to see Cadmus run out upon the great hand that held the hook of the scales, and begin to hack with his sword at the chain.

There was a yell from the crowd as the scale began again to rock, and there seemed no chance of aid, for there was no one near enough to stop the demented man. But a figure sprang out from the opening in the chest of the idol whence Cadmus had emerged and threw itself upon the priest.

"Rai — it is Rai!" whispered Ronwen, and the others drew shuddering breaths.

Then from below came the clang of opening doors, the tramp of marching men, and the shouts of Mago's lieutenant, Malcho, and of Tola.

Cadmus fought like the maniac he was, but Rai in the fearful fight on the narrow space managed to disarm him just as Balin and Gilla, having made a black priest show them the way, dashed to his help.

There were more tense minutes as the scale with its living burden was raised, but they were lifted in safety to the level of the opening, and the wooden platform run out. This time a rail was

run out as well, and willing hands aided the white and shaken victims of the cruel jest of Cadmus; the girls had to be carried, for they were all faint with horror and grief at the awful fate of Bochar, who had saved their lives.

That evening Rai said that as he knelt by the grating in the den of the crocodiles, the voice that spoke to him out of the darkness told him how to climb up by the side of the space into the cell where the owner of the voice was confined. This proved to be a white priest, who the first night of their arrival had spoken to them by the door. He had been lured into prison by a priest of Moloch, lest he should befriend the destined victims. With his aid Rai made a plan of escape. He had waited by the grate until the keeper of the crocodiles had come to bring the creatures their food, and then he and the priest of Eli had overcome him and made their way out into the underground places of the temple.

While they were waiting, the cell having the same wall as the ledge below, they had heard the priests planning the business of the scales. "They meant you to outweigh the gold, of course."

"Yes," said Chabrias, "but another willed otherwise."

Then Balin told his story of their experience in the cave with the lions. "They were bewildered at first, just stood there and sniffed. The whole place was a welter of spilled wine and pools of blood and bits of broken jar, and the smell of the blood began to excite the lions. They picked their way among the litter and sniffed at the blood. Then they began to growl, and that waked the half-conscious, wounded people, and they screamed. One lion licked at a dead body, and another took a foot of one of the wounded men in its mouth. We could not stand that; so we pelted the creatures with the rubbish lying on the shelf. They growled and roared, and there was a horrifying noise. And in the midst of it one of the soldiers, who was opposite the hole over the gate, pointed to it and shouted something. We couldn't hear, but I knew that some one must be looking in. So I jumped down and ran across to the steps, thinking every second to feel the beasts on me from behind. And Gilla jumped, too, and killed one with that club of his. He could not get back to the ledge, so he climbed up on to the windlass,

and I put my head through the opening and asked them — the people outside — for spears. And when we had the spears, we killed the lions and opened the gate."

There was a chorus of exclamations. They embraced Balin and made of him a hero, and Gilla, too, for they could tell how much more to the story there was than what Balin had told.

They talked then of Bochar very sadly, for they had grown fond of the cheerful, helpful little man.

"It was a wonderful thing he did," said Mago. "It shames me that it was only he that thought of doing it."

"He asked me if I could see how much we would outweigh the gold," said Jair. "And, the gods forgive me, I thought he was afraid!"

Chabrias spoke no word of his conversation with Bochar, and Bochar's secret was safe.

When all was quiet once more, Mago, at the urgent request of the majority of the people, was crowned King of the Valley, and then he and Elissa were married in the white temple by old Eli. And so were Argia and Belus.

It was decided that Rai and Balin, with Cha-

brias, Gilla, and Jair, should try to find their way with the aid of Dido's map northward by "the river of Egypt", to take thither to Hannibal the diamonds, since they were more easily portable than the gold, and at least to get news of him.

In the meantime, one night Rai and Balin were standing on the roof of the palace that was now their dwelling. They were supposed to be helping Chabrias with a chart of stars, but Eli came up, and when Eli and Chabrias began to talk, there was no thought of any other matter.

The boys went apart and, leaning over the parapet, looked at the lights of Lulala, listening to the sounds of singing and laughter that came up in the warm night air.

"In all this big country," said Rai, thoughtfully, "there must be other valleys like this. What I want to do is to find one — and make a kingdom of my own."

"Let us do it, then," said Balin.

And they fell to talking of all they would and would not have in that happy place.